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## Cabinet approves action plan on haze

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Cabinet today approved a national action plan on the haze which, among others, calls for car pooling, an increase in vehicle parking charges and a reduction in public transport fares when the air quality reaches unhealthy level.

The action plan, drawn up by the National Haze Committee, also calls for more drastic measures when the air quality reaches very unhealthy and hazardous levels.

However, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said he would reveal these after the respective agencies had been formally informed.

Moreover, he said, the agencies involved would have to discuss how to implement the plan.

"They also need some time to get ready and to put all the machinery into place. It will take a week or two for the implementation," Law told reporters after the Cabinet meeting.

The plan, a short-term measure to tackle the haze problem, has to be implemented by various agencies, including the Transport Ministry, local authorities and the departments of Environment and Road Transport.

As decided by the Cabinet recently, the national committee on disaster management and relief will co-ordinate the implementation of the plan once the air quality reaches the hazardous level.

Law said the plan spelt out the various measures to be taken by the respective agencies for the different levels of air quality as indicated by the Malaysian Air Pollutant Index.

(Under the API, readings from zero to 50 indicate good air quality, 51 to 100 moderate, 101 to 200 unhealthy, 201 to 300 very unhealthy and 301 to 500 hazardous.)

The measures to be taken once the air quality reaches the unhealthy level under the plan are:

- \* local authorities will increase parking charges to discourage people from driving into affected areas;

- \* the Transport Ministry will ask public transport operators to reduce fares and encourage the people to car-pool;

- \* local authorities will ask quarry operators to use sprinklers to reduce dust;

- \* the DOE will alert industries to reduce smoke emission. The department will prepare a list of the industries involved;

- \* the DOE will ensure all operations causing the discharge of volatile organic compound such as spraying, painting and flaring, are minimised;

- \* the DOE will ask industries and power stations to reduce the use of oil fuel;

- \* the DOE, local authorities, police air wing, the Forestry Department, the Federal Land Development Authority and the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority will intensify enforcement to prevent illegal open burning.

Law said when the air quality was classified as moderate, the DOE would intensify enforcement activities by issuing prohibition orders on vehicles emitting excessive smoke as well as checking open burning. The air quality would be monitored daily even on normal days.

"We hope public transport operators and agencies will give their full co-operation. After all, the haze lasts only a few months."

Law also stressed that the plan was not meant to alarm the people but to inform them that the Government was taking measures to deal with the situation.

"The plan is important. We have to be prepared in case the haze worsens," he said, adding that Indonesia would be informed about the plan so that it would know what Malaysia was doing at the national level.

National committee on disaster management and relief chairman Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, who is also Information Minister, will submit a copy of the plan to Indonesia when he attends a meeting there tomorrow.

To complement the short-term measures, the National Haze Committee has also drawn up a long-term plan to fight the haze.

The measures include introducing and enforcing laws on emission from petrol and diesel-powered vehicles and the use of catalytic converters; reducing lead content in petrol; encouraging the use of unleaded petrol; enforcing laws on emission from industries; imposing heavier penalties for serious offences and on repeat offenders; encouraging the use of natural gas especially for public transport; establishing a network of automatic air quality monitoring system; and encouraging industries to shift from urban to rural areas.

Law said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today suggested the possibility of Malaysia carrying out cloud seeding during the dry season as an additional measure to curb the haze.

He said Malaysia had the technology for the project and that it would also co-operate with Indonesia. The Meteorological Services Department has been directed to look into this.

On the possibility of the haze returning during the 1998 Commonwealth Games, Law said he had directed the committee to meet on a monthly basis from now and weekly from next April to look into the matter.

Law said he would also invite an official from Sukom to sit in the committee.

"We will incorporate the short and long-term measures, including those at the regional level, to ensure there is no haze during the Games."

Law also said 49,927 vehicles had been booked by the DOE, the RTD and the police for excessive smoke emission since the Cabinet's directive to the authorities to take stern action against those polluting the air on July 13 last year.

Today's air quality reading showed that Kuching had reached the unhealthy level at 115 on the API. All major towns in Sarawak reported severe haze with visibility level reduced to 1.2km.

Areas such as Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Gombak, Kajang, Seberang Prai, Ipoh, Nilai, Malacca, Kuantan and Kemaman had moderate air quality with readings between 53 and 78.

Visibility in Kuantan, the Klang Valley, Johor and Tawau was between two and four kilometres.

Law said satellite images showed that "hot spots" in East Kalimantan had increased. However, fewer such spots were reported in Sumatra.

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