

26 SEP 1997

Haze-Relax

SARAWAK EMERGES OUT OF HAZARDOUS SITUATION

By: Caroline Jackson

KUCHING, Sept 26 (Bernama) -- The haze level in Sarawak continued to go down this afternoon with visibility showing substantial improvement compared to this morning

The Air Pollutant Index (API) at 6 pm today was 286, the lowest recorded since the haze emergency was declared eight days ago.

At the time when the emergency was declared the API level was above 600, way beyond the hazardous level of between 301-500, with the highest reading recorded so far was 851 at 1 pm. on Tuesday.

There are good prospects for the reading to continue to take a dip following a change in the weather condition, Deputy Chief Minister, Datuk Dr George Chan Hong Nam said today.

With the improved situation the emergency guidelines issued by the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been relaxed to enable more sectors affected by the order to continue their operation to some extent.

Under the emergency, all schools, government and private offices, factories, quarries, earthwork and construction activities had been ordered to temporarily halt their operations.

The order however exempted those in the essential sector such as in the food production, pharmaceutical and pharmacies, clinics and hospital, power and water supplies.

Last Monday Deputy State Secretary One, Datuk Abdul Aziz Hussein issued a directive for government offices and private sectors to operate on a minimum scales and employees were told to stay at home unless called by their heads to turn up for works.

In announcing the relaxation, Dr Chan who is also chairman of the State Disaster and Relief Management Committee said that it would come up with certain conditions.

Those in the agriculture, plantations and palm oil sectors, could begin their operation provided that they complied with the existing environmental laws and that they must ensure that the operation be carried out at minimum level.

"The harvesting of fresh fruit bunches (ffbc) can proceed with workers given face masks and that they be under minimum exposure to the haze," he said at a joint news conference here with his counterpart, deputy chief minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu.

Relaxation of the guideline also applied to the timber-based industries, cement/clinker plants, batching, pre-mix and asphalt plants and construction activities.

These sectors must cease their operation when the API level is above 500. When the API is between 300 and 500, they could operate with one shift only of a maximum of four hours and when the API is below 300, they could operate normally with workers provided with face masks.

Quarries and earthworks however are still not permitted to operate until the emergency order is lifted.

Dr Chan said only the electronics industries are permitted to operate.

"These industries have incurred huge financial losses because their activities had to close down under the emergency order," he added.

However he could not say the extent of the losses suffered per day and the number of workers affected by the closure of the industries.

He said in relaxing the order, the government also took into

consideration the social and economic consequences faced by the people and the ability of the small companies to pay their daily workers if the closure were to continue.--BERNAMA

CJ AAM