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Environment-Act

CABINET OKAYS DRAFT AMENDMENTS AIMED AT CURBING OPEN BURNING

KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 (Bernama) -- The Cabinet has approved the draft amendments to the Environmental Quality Act (EQA) that stipulate that landowners and occupiers alike are responsible for open burning activities on their land.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today that under the amendments, the fine for open burning would also be increased from RM100,000 to RM500,000. The amendments will be tabled at the on-going Parliament sitting,

"They will be given a chance to defend themselves in proving that the open burning is not intentionally caused by them, they didn't give their approval (to start it), or the malicious act is done by someone else.

"They should also prove that immediate actions are taken to put out the fire the moment they know about it," he told reporters after attending the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Under an initial plan, the Department of Environment (DOE) had proposed to take action only against landowners for open burning activities.

Law said Section 44 of the EQA would also be amended requiring the DOE to get a consent letter from the prosecutor before proceeding with prosecution.

This was to harmonise it with the Federal Constitution, he said.

The minister said the authorities detected 264 cases of open burning throughout the country from April 8 till yesterday.

They happened in forests (103 cases), plantations and secondary jungles (72), construction sites (12), dumpsites (32) and industries (45).

Law also said the Cabinet had issued a directive that all high-rise buildings be installed with water sprinkler system the soonest possible to help keep the amount of particulate matters in the air and temperature low.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad even suggested that fountains be built at disused mining pools to bring down the level of dust and temperature at certain places," he said.

Law said a test conducted using a sprinkler system at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre yesterday showed that particulate matters could be reduced from seven to 90 per cent depending on their sizes.

He said 7,115 litres of water sprayed for 53 minutes from the 44th floor of the Petronas Twin Towers had managed to bring down temperature in the vicinity by five degree Celcius.

The minister said a similar test might be conducted at the Kuala Lumpur Tower before next Wednesday.

He also said a meeting with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) would be held on May 12 to see how they could help the government in tackling problems like open burning and smoky environment affecting the country.

On another matter, he said satellite images of six water catchment areas in Selangor had been forwarded to Dr Mahathir, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Velly and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar.

Law said the photos, taken on Jan 28 last year, would enable the concerned authorities to check the extent of development taking place in those areas which could have an affect on rainfall especially with the current water crisis.

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