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Law-Haze

DISTRICT-LEVEL HAZE PANELS ON ALERT FOR RECURRENCE

KUALA LUMPUR, March 18 (Bernama) -- All district-level haze committees have been directed to activate their haze action plan in anticipation of a recurrence of haze caused by local forest fires and open burning.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said today he had also held a meeting with related agencies yesterday to inform them on prevention steps to stop the forest fires and open burning.

The agencies included the Department of Environment (DOE), Meteorological Services Department, Malaysian Centre for Remote Sensing, Forestry Department, Local Authorities, Fire and Rescue Department, National Security Division and police.

"The prevention measures will focus on local sources and the most effective agents are the district level committees," he told reporters here.

Asked whether the stress on local sources, mainly forest fires and open burning, indicated the seriousness of the problem, Law said it was taken as preventive measures based on previous experience.

"The recurrence of forest fires, man-made and natural causes, not only happens in Malaysia but worldwide... but we can't wait until we are severely affected," he said.

Law admitted that the number of local forest fires had increased this year compared to last year due to human factors, drought and natural causes.

He, however, said that so far local sources had not caused major haze in the country but the government was equally concerned about both local and outside sources.

He said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had also asked for cloud-seeding operations to be continued not only to fight forest fires but to tackle drought problems.

Dr Mahathir had also asked the ministry to consider using a Russian-made helicopter that could be used to combat forest fires more efficiently.

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On the standard for ammonia discharge in rivers, Law said the DOE was still formulating it and it was expected to be implemented soon.

He said the Chemistry Department would release an explanation on ammonia effects on human health this week to clear misunderstandings and fears among the public.

Ammonia pollution in Sungai Langat had recently forced the frequent closures of several water treatment plants in Selangor, causing an acute water shortage in several places here and Selangor.

-- BERNAMA

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