

# King voices concern about haze

# HM wants daily reports on situation in North

---

**CHEEWIN SATTHA**

**THEERAWAT KHAMTHITA**

**APINYA WIPATAYOTIN**

His Majesty the King has voiced concern over the haze situation in the North as the air quality in several northern provinces is poised to reach danger levels.

Amnat Decha, caretaker of the Phuping Palace in Chiang Mai, said yesterday that His Majesty had instructed that reports on the haze situation in the northernmost provinces be sent to the Royal Household Bureau every day.

If the situation does not improve, the King would order artificial rain-making to help relieve air pollution in the haze-hit provinces, said Mr Amnat.

In a bid to fight the haze, the Public Health Ministry is to send 200,000 face masks to the areas to protect people from air pollution caused by dust particles smaller than 10 microns in diameter, also known as PM10, that come with the haze, said Public Health Minister Chaiya Sasomsab.

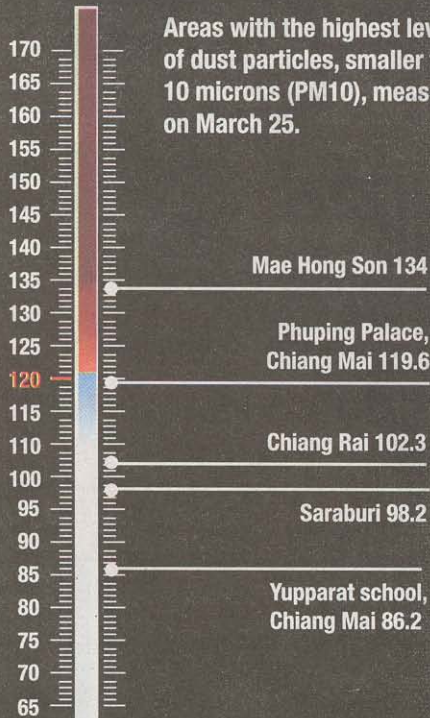
Pollution Control Department chief Supat Wangwongwatana said heavy dust in northern provinces is closely related to "hot spots" found in the country and also in neighbouring countries, referring to areas at risk of forest fires.

"We have found that the number of hot spots in Indochina was getting high on March 22 with 952, and gradually dropped to 575 and only 271 on March 24. Moreover, we have made strong and effective efforts to clear and control hot spots, which helps improve the situation," he said.

However, higher humidity in the air should minimise the dust's impact.

Spokesman for the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry Pichet Wangtepanukhor said the ministry has been

# DUSTY ATTACK



Areas with the highest levels of dust particles, smaller than 10 microns (PM10), measured on March 25.

Mae Hong Son 134

Phung Palace,  
Chiang Mai 119.6

Chiang Rai 102.3

Saraburi 98.2

Yupparat school,  
Chiang Mai 86.2

Unit: microgramme/  
cubic metre

Note: The maximum  
permissible level of PM10  
in the air is 120 ug/ cu m.

## What is PM10

PM10 is a tiny dust particle whose size is less than 10 microns in diameter (about 1/7th the thickness of a human hair).

They come from motor vehicles, slash-and-burn farming, waste burning, forest fires, heavy industries, and dust from construction sites.

PM10 is among the most harmful of air pollutants. When inhaled, these particles lodge deep in the lungs and can cause many kinds of respiratory illnesses.

Source: Pollution Control Department

POSTgraphics

working closely with the Agriculture and Cooperatives Ministry to deal with the problem, especially fire prevention in paddy fields. However, rain was arriving in many areas and this has helped to reduce the dust problem.

Among the haze-affected provinces,

Mae Hong Son has been hardest hit due to wildfires.

The level of dust in the province was yesterday measured at 134 microgrammes per cubic metre, higher than the safe level of 120 microgrammes per cu m, according to the Pollution Control

Department.

At the same time, the province's air quality level was measured at 106 on the Air Quality Index, which is higher than the safety level of 100.

Outside Mae Hong Son town, wildfires could be seen raging upon high

mountains at night, especially in Ban Nam Kad and Ban Huai Phung.

Mae Hong Son deputy governor Wan-chai Sutthiworachai said forest fires had broken out frequently this summer.

The latest was on Monday night, when a fire broke out in a public park in Muang district and more than 60 provincial authorities in the province spent over two hours putting out the fire.

Triroj Nawamarat, manager of Thai Airways International office in Mae Hong Son, said THAI had had to cancel a flight scheduled to land at Mae Hong Son airport at 11am yesterday due to poor visibility at the airport, which was measured at 1,200 metres, far below the safe visibility level for commercial aircraft of between 3,000 and 3,500 metres.

The chief of the meteorological office in Mae Hong Son, Thada Sattha, said haze in the northern province was mostly caused by forest burning in Pai, Pang Ma Pha and Muang districts.

However, in Chiang Mai, deputy governor Wiboon Sanguanphong insisted the air conditions in the province were still far from hazardous and that the haze has not yet driven tourists away.

He believed rain would help ease the dust level in Chiang Mai's air within 14 days.

The deputy governor added that wild-fires in Chiang Mai recently broke out in Hot, Mae Chaem and Omkoi districts where corn farmers usually burnt their fields after the harvest season.

Nevertheless, adviser to the Association of Chiang Mai Tourism and Hotel Businesses Bunlert Buranupakorn said advance bookings for hotels in Chiang Mai this and next month have dropped by 20%.

He believed this was due to tourists' concern over their health and environmental conditions in Chiang Mai.

## WILDFIRES

# Two forestry employees burn to death

APINYA WIPATAYOTIN

Two forestry employees were burned to death in the northeastern province of Chaiyaphum yesterday while they were trying to douse a rapidly spreading forest fire in the Tabor-Huay Yai wildlife sanctuary.

Prasit Sonprasert, 68, and Rungthong Soisri, 18, were trying to create a firebreak when they were consumed by the intense fire. Eyewitnesses said they were badly burned after being choked by the smoke and died on the way to hospital.

Kitti Teawtrakulwat, chief of the provincial forest fire control office, said around 200 forest fires had broken out in the province over the past three months, ravaging over 20,000 rai of forest cover.

The office is facing a severe shortage of staff and is not in a position to control the fires, especially when they break out at several spots at the same time, he said, adding that most forest fires were caused by poachers of wild animals and flora.

Saran Jaisa-ard, director of the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department's forest protection and fire control office, said this year's forest fire situation is not expected to be as serious as last year, when a total of 117,395 rai were damaged.

This was due to the high humidity brought in by the La Nina phenomenon. The office will have to closely monitor the situation until the end of the dry season in April, said Mr Saran.

The department has instructed its officials to be on the alert for forest fires and other natural disasters since the global climate is becoming more difficult to predict. This means unexpected incidents could occur anytime.