



DoE Sarawak photo shows open burning detected in a peatland area.

'Heavy fines, jail for unauthorised open burning'

KUCHING: Those caught carrying out unauthorised open burning during the current hot and dry spell will face heavy fines and possible jail time, warned the Sarawak Department of Environment (DoE).

In a statement, the department reminded the public that open burning without approval from the relevant authorities may result in action under Section 29A of the Environmental Quality Act 1974 (Amendment 2024).

"Upon conviction, offenders may be fined not less than RM25,000 and not more than RM1 million, or jailed for up to five years, or both. They may also face an additional fine of up to RM5,000 for each day the offence continues after a notice to stop the activity has been issued.

"Offenders may also be subject to a maximum compound of up to 50 per cent of the maximum fine," it said.

The department urged the

public to work together in addressing environmental pollution and to report any polluting activities via its 24-hour toll-free hotline at 1-800-88-2727, its e-complaint portal, or email.

It explained that unauthorised open burning, particularly amid the ongoing hot and dry weather, can increase the risk of haze and uncontrolled fires.

The DoE stressed that prohibiting such burning is crucial to prevent deterioration in air quality due to severe pollution, especially during the dry season.

"Open burning includes the burning of agricultural waste, bushes or undergrowth, as well as domestic and construction waste.

"It also covers burning activities at landfill sites or peatland areas, and any controlled burning carried out without written approval from the authorities."

The department said pollution from open burning can have serious effects on public health, including asthma, cough, and bronchitis caused by fine particulate matter in smoke.

"It may also lead to respiratory and heart problems, especially among infants, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses," it said, adding that exposure to such pollution can also irritate the eyes, throat, and nose, reducing overall quality of life.

On the environmental impact, the department warned that open burning contributes to air pollution and haze, reflected in rising Air Pollutant Index readings.

"It also leads to degradation of soil and water quality due to burning residues, destruction of flora and fauna as well as forest and peatland ecosystems, and increased greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming," it said.