

Pollution plagues Asia

Fires in Indonesia lead to smoggy cities

JAMBI, Indonesia (AP) - The smoke is so thick it stings the eyes and burns the throat, making the simple act of breathing a chore. It's impossible to see beyond 50 feet and the sun seems to have disappeared.

Across Southeast Asia, people are struggling to cope with an unprecedented ecological disaster caused by hundreds of forest fires in Indonesia.

The fires - many of them deliberately set as a cheap way of clearing land - have been burning for months, creating a cloud of smoke that covers an area more than half the size of the continental United States.

Known as "the haze," it has made life miserable for millions of people, not only in Indonesia but also in Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, the Philippines and Thailand, where it has sent air pollution levels soaring.

The high-rise office buildings of Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, are barely visible. Some beach resorts in southern Thailand are blanketed. Airports across the region have been closed. Many schools have been shut down.

But nowhere is the smoke worse than in this town of 300,000 on the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

Jambi, 370 miles northeast of the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, is surrounded by a fire that has crept to within a few miles of the city. The forest undergrowth is alive with flames and with every hot, dry gust of wind, the sparks swirl high into the trees.

In town, long lines of coughing patients wait outside doctors' clinics. Hospital wards are full.

"I take cough medicine and wear a mask when I'm outside," said Roy Pernihutay, an operator with the local telephone company. "But I still find it hard to breathe. My head feels dizzy."

Smoke detectors have been switched off to keep them from rigging constantly. By early afternoon, the daylight is so dim that drivers must turn on their headlights.

The scene is the same on the island of Borneo and in parts of Java and Sulawesi.

To make matters worse, El Niño, an abnormal weather pattern over the Pacific Ocean, has brought on the worst drought in half a century, delaying monsoon rains that could ease the situation.

Indonesia and Malaysia have ordered planes to drop salt solution into clouds to induce artificial precipitation. But many aircraft have been grounded by lack of visibility. Those that do get into the air have trouble finding the right sort of clouds to seed.

"Allah will give us rain," said one of hundreds of Muslims who gathered to pray Thursday in Jambi.

Indonesia's President Suharto has apologized to his neighbors, saying his government is doing its best to tackle the problem. All land-clearing has been banned, and harsh new penalties have been enacted again against forest burners.

Indonesia has deployed more

than 8,000 firefighters, and 1,200 more have come from Malaysia. Other nations, including the United States, Japan, Australia, have offered assistance.

But some critics aren't satisfied.

"The government has reacted very slowly and must do more," said Emmy Halfidi of Walhi, an Indonesian environmental group.

The greatest toll so far has been in Irian Jaya, the Indonesian-controlled half of New Guinea, about 1,250 miles east of Jakarta. There, the thick smoke has stopped aircraft from delivering emergency supplies to remote villages where drought has withered gardens and dried up wells and streams.

Officials say at least 271 people in Irian Jaya have died of famine and from diseases spread by contaminated water.

Elsewhere, the haze has been blamed for two deaths, both in Indonesia, where 35,000 people have been treated for smoke inhalation. Another 16,000 people have become ill in Malaysia.

In Jambi, health officials have asked the town's only international standard hotel to reserve two floors for dozens of seriously ill respiratory patients. With its air conditioning, the hotel has the best air in town.

"This is a disaster," said a doctor in Jambi. "We are seeing upper respiratory problems now. But we are very worried about lower respiratory problems. There's the possibility of lung cancer in the years to come."

UNL men protest violence

BY KELLY SCOTT
Staff Reporter

Involvement

Confronting the issue of sexual assault is nothing new to Billy Apline. But it is something new for UNL as Men Speak Out Against Violence begins its mission.

The 10-member group, chartered this spring, is beginning to establish itself at UNL as the first men's group on campus to actively speak out against all types of violence. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln chapter's first project was to co-sponsor Sexual Assault Awareness Week this week.

The chapter formed as a bridge between the community chapter of Men Speak Out Against Violence campaigned by the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission and the UNL campus, said Apline, the group's

leader and founder of the chapter.

Apline, who has been closely involved with the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission and the community chapter of the Men Speak Out Against Violence, wants to keep close ties to both groups.

He said the group formed to foster communication and to provide a forum and dialogue among everyone about sexual assault issues.

"Unfortunately, most violence-related issues are considered women's issues," he said. "That's pretty ridiculous because it lets the opposite sex off the hook."

Judith Kriss, director of the Women's Center, said the group's key word was awareness.

The group provides an opportu-

nity for men to take a stand and to not just sit back and say there is a problem, Kriss said.

Co-sponsoring this week's activities with Sexual Assault Awareness Week is only the beginning for Men Speak Out Against Violence. The group's other plans are:

- Increasing membership.
- Improving communication between men and women.
- Establishing resources for students.
- Sponsoring activities to increase
- Coordinating a conference in the spring.

The group will be busy this semester planning specific details of the conference and other events, Apline said.

"We can't dissociate ourselves," Apline said. "Everyone needs to be part of the solution process."





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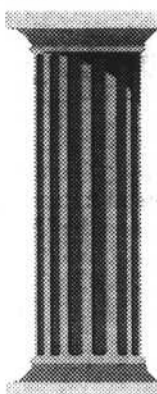
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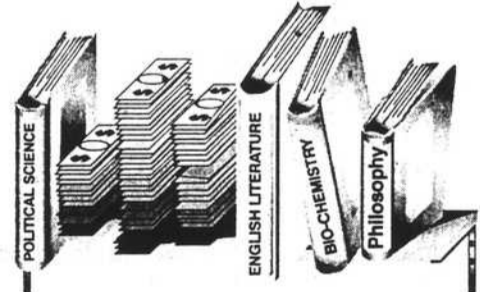
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