

PROACTIVE AND PREVENTIVE STEPS TO MINIMIZE IMPACTS OF DRY AND WARM SPELL

According to the Meteorological Department (MET Malaysia), the current Southwest monsoon season which will bring higher temperature and less rain than normal is expected to last until September. The high temperature and the dry spell will bring increased health related issues, water supply shortage, air quality problem, and wild fire possibility.

Not only in Malaysia, other countries are also experiencing out of the ordinary warm weather and drier season. Closer at home, it has been reported that Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand have registered record high temperatures. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Europe, the United States, Africa are facing their worst drought.

However, despite the present high temperature, Malaysia has revealed currently the likelihood of the country seeing an extreme heat wave which triggers drastic precautionary actions, is small. Malaysia's extra warmth temperature and drought season have been moderated by heavy rain in certain parts of the country.

Although we are not at the emergency level, the current dry and hot spell can still affect our well-being if not properly addressed.

With minimizing health hazards in mind, continuous reminders to the public have been issued by the various agencies. The Ministry of Health has come up with tips on how to stay healthy and avoid exposure to heat stroke. While, the Ministry of Education to schools, among others, has allowed school sessions and outdoor activities to be suspended when the temperature becomes extreme. Via various communication medium, the Department of Information, has also stepped up efforts to inform the public on ways to protect themselves. MET Malaysia too has published and shared the daily temperature reading so that we have advanced notice on any potential threats of extreme heat conditions. The media has also been instrumental in bringing into focus and alerting the public and the government agencies on the impacts and matters related to the current weather conditions.

Due to the widespread dissemination of information, we have seen increased public awareness on the health implications of the present heat wave.

Additionally, the government has also approached the situation with specific measures to mitigate the impacts of the current dry spell on the water supply.

Efforts to increase water levels in dams have also been made to minimize water rationing and supply disruptions. Cloud seeding operations have been conducted especially to encourage rain falls in the catchment areas. DID with state governments and the National Water Services Commission (Span) have also increased the intakes of raw water from rivers and others sources to dams to ensure comfortable water level and storage. Dam operators have also been asked to activate plans to control water release in anticipation of any prolong dry season. Additionally, public education programs on water conservation have also been actively pursued. Should the water level in dams drop to dangerous levels, water rationing plans are also ready in place. Up to date, there are three dams where their water levels are at dangerous levels – Timah Tasoh (Perlis), Sg Muda, Padu Beris (Kedah), Telok Bahang and Ayer Hitam (Penang).

Similarly, due to the current weather pattern, the Department of Drainage and Irrigation is monitoring closely seven river systems all over the country which have shown alarming trends of receding water levels. Span is also taking steps to monitor sufficient raw water is supplied to water treatment plants.

However, should water supply cut is required, Span is ready with water tankers and static tanks at critical areas.

To protect the agricultural sector, the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) has placed pumps at strategic locations to transfer raw water directly from its sources like rivers, canals, lakes to agricultural zones bypassing the normal distribution channels which is through the dam system. Through this way, the dependency of the agricultural sector on water supplied by dams is reduced. The DID has also redistributed water supply from water sufficient to water deficit dams through a series of underground tunnels. In addition, efforts to increase water level in dams through redistribution and diversion of raw water sources, potential sources of water have also been identified. The Department of Mineral and Geoscience has marked locations where ground water can be tapped.

With the warm and dry weather, the threat of open burning and wild fire has increased. Mitigating the impacts of the current dry season, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment, and Climate Change (NRECC) has activated the national open burning plan. The activation means enhanced and more monitoring operations to prevent open burning by the relevant enforcement agencies. On top of that, the enforcement of regulations vis-a-vis open burnings is done in stricter manner. Controlling open burning activities is important since they are sources of wild fire and haze.

At the same time, continuous monitoring by the Forestry Department and Fire and Rescue Department is in place to prevent wild and forest fires. Areas which are hotspots for wild and bush fire have been identified and monitored by both agencies.

At the international level, cooperation among ASEAN members have also drastically reduced the occurrences of transborder haze.

Although some quarters have raised the need for the government to declare a heat wave emergency in Malaysia, so far, the needs for such as actions are still not there. What we can say is the overall situation in the country is still under control and manageable. The government has taken preventive and proactive measures to mitigate the situation. At the same time, our country is also blessed with the fact that our temperature levels have not reached the critical levels despite the abnormally high temperature and drier season.

With all the proactive measures, better coordination among the government agencies, improved communication between the Federal and state governments, well informed society, Malaysia is more and better prepared to face the challenges posed by the current extreme weather conditions than the previous years. Nadma will work closely with all strategic partners to foster better coordination among the government agencies, improved communication between the Federal and state governments, and a well-informed society. With all the coordination work, proactive and preventive measures, Malaysia is better prepared to faced extreme weather conditions than in the previous years.

