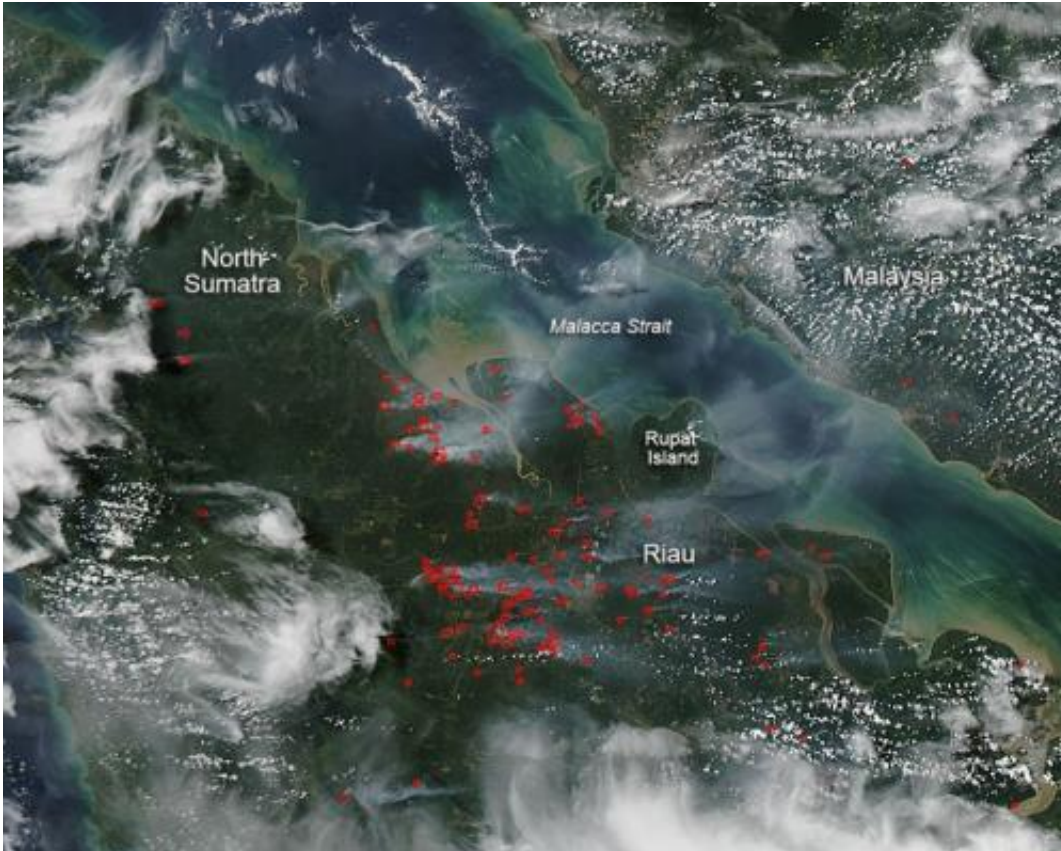


Land-clearing Blazes in Indonesia

July 22 2013



In Indonesia, land-clearing blazes dot the countryside. Fires for clearing land have been outlawed for all but the smallest landowners, but the "slash-and-burn" practice still persists despite cloaking Southeast Asia in toxic pollution for weeks. Better and more available satellite technology is helping identify culprits behind land-clearing blazes in Indonesia.

Unprecedented levels of air pollution in Singapore and Malaysia in June led to [respiratory illnesses](#), school closings, and grounded aircraft. This year it was so bad that in some affected areas there was a 100 percent rise in the number of asthma cases, and the government of Malaysia distributed gas masks.

This year's blazes were centered in the fast-growing province of Riau where the palm-oil and pulpwood industries are located. Fires set for land-clearing can get out of control on drained peatlands frequently cause significant damage to human health, human assets and biodiversity and release large amounts of [greenhouse gasses](#) which contribute to climate change. In addition, setting the dried peat ablaze to clear land is dangerous due to the fact that the dried peat is extremely inflammable and once burning, these fires can remain underground in the peat for some time and then rise to the surface at a considerable distance from the original outbreak making firefighting difficult.

The illegal burning of forests generally happens from June to September each year—during Indonesia's dry season.

Provided by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

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