

Rash of forest fires breaks out in Indonesia

February 21 2018



Photo taken in September 2015 shows Indonesia's President Joko Widodo inspecting a peatland clearing engulfed by fire: the blazes are breaking out again

Indonesia was battling a rash of forest fires Wednesday as it raised an alert over the blazes which occur every year and emit choking smog that can envelop neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia.

Fires have broken out in four provinces—South Sumatra, Riau, West Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan—prompting them to declare "alert emergency" status, one notch below the most severe warning.

Hundreds of hectares of land have been destroyed over the past week and the government is stepping up efforts to contain the fires.

The blazes are frequently deliberately set by farmers using [fire](#) to clear land for cultivation.

"We are now preparing planes for [cloud seeding](#) and helicopters for water bombing," said disaster mitigation agency Sutopo Purwo Nugroho.

The agency will deploy soldiers, police, firefighters and volunteers to combat the fires, officials said.

The annual [forest fires](#) on Sumatra island and the Indonesian part of Borneo island typically occur during the months-long dry season which usually begins in January.

In 2015 massive forest fires in Indonesia destroyed some two million hectares and sparked a massive haze outbreak over Singapore and Malaysia, leading to diplomatic frictions.

A US academic study estimated that the crisis may have led to more than 100,000 premature deaths.

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Citation: Rash of forest fires breaks out in Indonesia (2018, February 21) retrieved 7 February 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-rash-forest-indonesia.html>

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