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ENV unveils haze action plan

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ENV unveils haze action plan

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By

SCHOOLS and sports complexes will be shut when haze levels, monitored over 24-hours, blow past 300, the Environment Ministry said yesterday when it revealed its haze action plan.

This spells out staggered measures that would be taken at various levels of the Pollutants Standard Index (PSI).

It starts with providing health advice and regular PSI readings when pollution levels pass 100 and gets progressively more stringent to include keeping vehicles off the roads and requiring oil refineries and power plants to cut emissions.

When readings hit life-threatening levels of 400, Civil Defence sirens will sound and emergency radio broadcasts be made.

At a press briefing at the ENV building yesterday, ministry spokesman Wang Mong Lin outlined the measures Singapore has drawn up, in view of the worsening situa-

tion in parts of Malaysia and Indonesia, requiring emergency plans to swing into action there.

The situation in Singapore was much better, with the 24-hour PSI readings going into the unhealthy levels of more than 100 on three days so far, including yesterday, when the index was just six points short of the record reached in 1994.

Still, Mr Wang said, given public demands for more up-to-date information, the ministry will provide hourly updates, starting at 2 pm yesterday. Readings will be given every hour between 7 am and 10 pm.

But it was not possible to

provide haze forecasts, which many have asked for. A Meteorological Service official at the briefing said wind conditions could fluctuate and it was not possible to predict exact levels.

After the three-hour PSI readings reached an all-time high of 226 on Thursday night, the haze situation improved significantly yesterday.

It started at 79 at 7 am, rising to peak at 134 at 5 pm. It dipped to 70 at 10 pm.

Overall, the 24-hour reading, which is used by public health agencies around the world to determine the effects of air pollution on a person's health, was 138. It was lower than the record 142 reached on Sept 27, 1994.

Elaborating on the action plan, Mr Wang said ENV chairs a haze task force of officers from the ministries of Health, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Communications, Information and the Arts, and the Meteorological Service.

Besides implementing the

action plan, the task force also looked at the health effects of the haze. In the three weeks since Aug 22, attendances at 13 polyclinics have gone up for six haze-related complaints, said an ENV ministry official.

More people have come forward with complaints of conjunctivitis, respiratory in-

fections, acute rhinitis or runny nose, asthma, bronchitis and eczema or skin rashes.

In the case of respiratory infections, or flu-like symptoms, it went up 13 per cent from 8,288 a week in 1996 to 9,395 for the week ending Sept 13.

The highest percentage increase was seen in acute bronchitis cases, which more than doubled from 57 a week last year to 128 for the week ending Sept 13.

The ministry official, however, added that it could not be confirmed if the increase was solely the result of the haze.

As for the ministry's position on one of the most frequently asked questions during the haze — "Should I wear a mask?" — he said: "Although some people may find relief from using them, in most cases they are not effective."

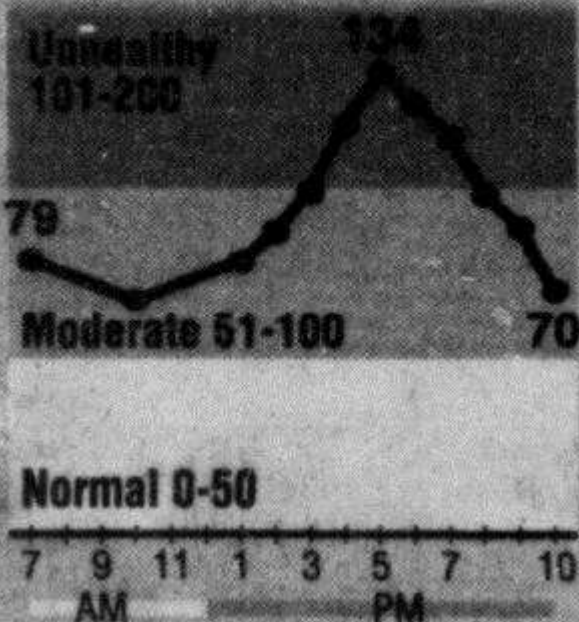
If the haze gets worse

24 hr PSI value	What to do	ENV action
Up to 50 Good		None
51-100 Moderate		None
101-200 Unhealthy	Reduce physical exertion and outdoor activity, especially those with heart or respiratory problems.	ENV will continue to inform the public on the PSI on an hourly basis and issue health advisories.
	The elderly and people with heart or lung diseases should stay indoors and reduce physical activity. The rest should not take part in physical outdoor activity.	Fuel-burning industries and vehicle fleet owners will be asked to cut down emissions. Public media announcements to cut unnecessary travelling.
301-400 Hazardous	The sick, the elderly and children should stay indoors. The rest should avoid unnecessary outdoor activity.	Schools and sports complexes will be shut.
Over 400 Hazardous	Everyone should remain indoors and keep the windows and doors closed and also minimise physical exertion.	Civil Defence sirens will be sounded and the public will have to tune in to the radio for announcements on air quality and health advisories. The public will be told of additional measures to be taken.

RAYMOND LEE

PSI readings yesterday

24-hour reading: 138



ENV Hotline: 1800-731-9222

FOO HWEI WEN

