

The Straits Times, 19 September 1997, Page 1

Haze hits pollution index record of 226

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Haze hits pollution index record of 226
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By I

THE haze thickened in mid-afternoon yesterday, sending the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) to an all-time high of 226 at 10 pm and visibility plummeting to a few hundred metres in the worst-hit western part of the island.

The worsening prompted, among other things, about 50 calls to flood The Straits Times NewsLine after 7 pm asking what the latest PSI reading was and what the Government was doing about the pollution.

The Environment Ministry (ENV), which was asked if it would give hourly PSI updates, said that haze forecasts and hourly updates were "unlikely" as it considers the current three-hourly updates "adequate".

Many of the anxious callers who reached NewsLine after 7 pm disagreed. They want hourly or even half-hourly updates for the safety of motorists, they said.

Most of them said that they called NewsLine to ask for the PSI update because it was not reported in the Television Corporation of Singapore's 7 pm news bulletin.

At 1 pm, the PSI was 79. By 4 pm, it had rocketed to 122.

All the callers complained about poor visibility and a

about poor visibility and a strong smoky smell.

Human resource assistant Wendy Sng, 23, who lives in Chai Chee Street, said: "The haze is getting into the flat and the whole place is filled with smoke. It is like the Hungry Ghost Festival all over again except that this time it is as if people are burning incense paper in the house."

The previous PSI high of 142, a 24-hour reading, was recorded on Sept 27, 1994. It also resulted from haze caused by fires in Indonesia. The 226 reading was for the three hours before 10 pm.

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 to tackle the problem. It last met on Aug 8.

In response to queries from The Straits Times, ENV said: "The task force has drawn up a haze action plan that covers the general health effects for different PS ranges, the health advisories to be issued and other response plans."

But it did not respond to two questions on what recommendations it had made or measures it would take if the haze got worse.

Picture by



A man crossing Zion Road at 7.05 pm yesterday. Visibility in some parts of Singapore fell to a few hundred metres. —

TERENCE TAN.