

## Water, firefighters and sand win battle against blaze



**NIBONG TEBAL:** What does it take to put out 11ha of fire at a landfill?

Besides bravery and persistence, a whopping 4.8 million litres of water. That was the amount used during the 20 days of fire-fighting at the Pulau Burung landfill.

Penang Fire and Rescue Department assistant director (operations) Mohd Hafiz Hafizal Timaradin said this involved two water tankers, each ferrying about 20,000 litres of water, on five to six trips daily during the operation that finally ended on Tuesday.

Other than water tankers, a helicopter was also used to carry out more than 50 rounds of water bombing on the site for two days.

Mohd Hafiz said the ground operation involved water jets from Fixed Monitors and a nozzle from high-performance pump modules that were brought in from Negri Sembilan and Perak.

He added that sand was also dumped on the area to stop the fire from spreading.

“About 100 firefighters had to work double shifts to quell the burning rubbish that spewed clouds of toxic smoke for more than three weeks.

“They took turns on 12-hour shifts during the night-and-day operation,” he said when contacted.

Mohd Hafiz also attributed the success in putting out the fire to cooperation with agencies like Penang Island City Council, Seberang Prai City Council (MBSP) and the Environment Department.

He said the landfill operator and Civil Defence Force also helped out by using their own water pumps.

“I appreciate the hard work shown by the officers and personnel throughout the operation.

“There were many challenges such as water pressure problems and strong winds that hampered the firefighting effort.

“The scorching heat, unpleasant smells and the risk of getting trapped in a pile of rubbish in the landfill were among the many risks and challenges faced by personnel at the site.

“Fortunately, no firefighters were injured during the operation.

“Those on duty during the operation have undergone medical checkups to ensure they are healthy,” he added.

The fire at the more-than-11ha landfill broke out on Jan 12.

Toxic fumes at the landfill resulted in air pollution that affected Ladang Byram and Kampung Kebun Baru nearby, prompting the evacuation of some 400 people from both villages.

Also, 10 schools within a 10km radius of the landfill were ordered to close for three days from Jan 19.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) said the fire-fighting operation in Pulau Burung landfill had compounded the low water pressure issue at several high ground and end-of-pipeline residential areas in South Seberang Prai.

Its chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said firemen had drawn water from nearby rivers, while the voluntary firefighters and MBSP had also taken water from PBAPP hydrants located near the landfill area during the operation.

“Such firefighting activities have reduced water pressure to some areas in the district,” he said in a statement yesterday.

Jaseni said the hot weather and higher pre-Chinese New Year usage were also key factors that worsened the low water pressure issue.

He said due to the high temperature, consumers on the mainland have been using more water daily.

“With many people celebrating Chinese New Year, the annual festive high consumption trend is likely to continue until mid-February,” he said.