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Dear Friends,

Should We Be Complacent About the Haze?

The haze has returned with Singapore's air pollution or Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) moving up and down recently. Days when the air is healthy is when we should thank the winds for it.

The haze will get worse if the plantations in Sumatra and Borneo continue burning forests to make way for palm oil and pulp and paper production. Having experienced the worst haze crisis in our history in June 2013, we look forward to see positive impact from the measures taken since then by the Singapore and Indonesia governments arising from the Asean Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.

The Singapore government had recently passed a Bill that would impose fines on companies that cause or contribute to transboundary haze pollution in Singapore. Indonesia's Parliament recently agreed to ratify the Asean transboundary bill.

Far from being a silver bullet, this is still encouraging news. But it is not enough. As consumers, we can pitch in to help resolve the issue, by knowing what to look out for when buying our daily consumerables from the supermarket, for a start. We can also lend our voice to encourage our favourite retailers and brands to do the right thing, through ethical and sustainable practice and transparency in product labelling.

Now more than ever, we should be better prepared and not allow ourselves to get caught flat-footed should the haze worsen. This is beyond buying face masks and air purifiers, monitoring outdoor activities or businesses having contingency plans.

What can we do as consumers?

First and foremost, we need to know what motivates the farmers and plantation owners to deliberately burn to clear forest land. Burning remains the preferred method as it requires minimal labour, is quick and cheap. Conversion for palm oil and paper production in Sumatra are the biggest drivers of deforestation and haze. Major corporations were subsequently identified to have contributed to the severe haze that blanketed Singapore from June to September in 2013. Political will and intervention will address this – to an extent.

We should do our part. Ask our favourite retailers and brands to do the right thing. Are they adopting sustainable practices in producing our daily products? And that includes the way they produce palm oil.

Palm oil is used in about 50% of all packaged food products in supermarkets today. By 2020, global palm oil demand is expected to double. With little knowledge and information on the supply chain process, consumers are unable to identify products containing sustainably produced palm oil.

WWF is not against palm oil usage, but the way it is produced today, that is through errant burning for quick and easy solutions. Every year, the haze clouds our skies and affects our health and business. In June 2013 Singapore's pollution level hit a hazardous and record high 401 on the PSI. Many of us had to seek medical treatment for respiratory-related ailments and were caught

unprepared as face masks and air purifiers ran out. Several offices and businesses had to take precautionary measures to protect their employees and customers from the haze. Singapore's economy was reported to have lost an estimated US\$1 billion a week.

This is a global problem that requires a concerted effort beyond government regulation. As consumers, we have the right to demand that the products we buy are produced with the least harm to the environment. To this end, let us urge the producers to go for CSPO-certification (certified sustainable palm oil) and we can use our power by choosing CSPO-labelled products.

WWF has taken a long-term strategy to resolve the problem. In Malaysia and Indonesia, our work includes outreach to plantation owners and businesses to address this issue. WWF in Indonesia continue to work on the underlying issues of deforestation and to help the government identify and protect forests of high biodiversity value. We have a dedicated palm oil team that promotes sustainable production and supports the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, upholding the belief that palm oil companies must take responsibility for the full supply chain and ensure that not only their plantations, but also the fruit or processed oil from their third party providers, are not fuelling the haze.

Collectively, we must remain vigilant and use our power to do what is right – and healthy. Even when Singapore enjoys a respite from the haze, let us not forget the haze will return with a vengeance if governments, environmental groups, companies and members of the public do not come together to take action.



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