

# **The UNISDR Regional Southeast Asia Wildland Fire Network: Network Activities 2011-2015 – Progress Report**

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## **Abstract**

The South East Asia Regional Wildland Fire Network was established in 2011 as a thematic network consisting of wildland fire experts from the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) member countries. During the last five years, satellite observations revealed there was a significant increase of land-use fires and wildfires in the ASEAN region. The negative impacts of the fire could be seen especially during the years 2012 to 2014, during which smoke blanketed the Maritime Continent and its neighboring countries through transboundary haze pollution. This phenomenon of severe regional smoke pollution continued to occur despite the signing of ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution in 2002, a regional legally binding agreement that aimed at reducing the occurrence and impacts of fire in the ASEAN Member States. Apart of the continuation of illegal conversion of native vegetation, including peat land biomes, to agricultural and industrial plantations, excessive use of fire in the North of the mainland (Northern Thailand and neighboring countries) caused additional widespread smoke pollution with adverse impacts on human health and wellbeing.

However, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conferences a number of activities have been accomplished to increase the awareness of local communities and other land managers regarding the safety and legality of fire use. In 2014, finally all ASEAN member states had ratified the agreement. This means that all ASEAN countries are now ready to implement the agreement together. To do so, meetings at Ministerial level are conducted regularly.

The role and promotion of active community participation is increasingly recognized by the authorities in the region. Another activity is law enforcement as it is increasingly being conducted at the level of district administrations and corporations, which have to comply with audit rules. At the country level, a transboundary haze bill was proposed by one the member countries in 2014, as one tool to investigate who is behind the smoke and haze that blanketed the country, causing economic disturbances such as tourism, trade, transportation, health, etc.

The help of universities in addressing and contributing to solve the fire problem indirectly through thematic field work has been enlisted in Riau province, Indonesia, in the period of July and August 2015. This collaboration has involved about 40 Universities from Indonesia and Malaysia. The students try to verify reasons behind the fires and possible practical solutions to be approached and implemented.

**Key words:** *Regional South East Asia Wildland Fire Network, Pan-Asia Wildland Fire Network Cluster, Global Wildland Fire Network*