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## Over 900 forest fire calls made in three months

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BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

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THE Fire and Rescue Department received a total of 902 phone calls on forest fires across the nation from January to March this year.

Statistics provided by the department showed that Brunei-Muara had the highest number of fire reports with 412 phone calls.

This was followed with Belait with 256 phone calls, Tutong with 230 phone calls and Temburong with only four calls.

According to the department, Brunei lost 1278.47 hectares of land to both forest and bush fires within three months.

1062.6 of the hectares were forest fires while 215.87 hectares were grass fires.

Brunei-Muara was the most heavily affected district with a total of 575.86 hectares lost.

Tutong lost 365.44 hectares and Belait lost 334.07 hectares.

In Temburong, only 3.1 hectares were lost to similar flames.

According to the department's spokesperson, the causes of a majority of these fires were due to human error and negligence.

“Open burning is illegal but many people still conduct this activity. People who carry out open burning usually tend to leave the fire without supervision. If it is windy, the fire can easily spread to other areas.

“People need to be (equipped) with in-depth knowledge about open burning especially its consequences and penalty. The open burning is damaging the environment,” said the department.

In a previous report, 80 hectares of forest and peat land in Belait were lost to fire. Stakeholders identified the cause of the fire to be arson.

The department's latest findings revealed that such fires might have been ignited by the illegal dumping and burning of rubbish, improper disposal of cigarette butts, not putting out campfires after fishing and setting fire to clear land for farming.

In an effort to solve the fire issue in the sultanate, the Brunei Darussalam Meteorological Department (BDMD) this year will implement a new computer system namely the Weather Hazard Index System (WHIS).

The system can identify locations in the sultanate that are at high risk of catching fire.

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