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Volume 3, 5 January 2024 (B.E. 2567)

## Announcement of entering dust season: all agencies have strictly controlled the source of particulate matter.

On January 5, 2024, Pol. Gen. Patcharawat Wongsuwan, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, assigned Captain Rachata Pisitbannakorn, Assistant Minister of Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), and Ms. Preeyaporn Suwanaged, Director General of the Pollution Control Department (PCD), to hold a press conference to announce that dust season has arrived and ask all agencies to control the source of particulate matter strictly.

Captain Rachata said that the government, led by the Prime Minister, paid attention to solving the PM<sub>2.5</sub> problem. The Prime Minister assigned the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment as the Chairman of the committee to manage air pollution problems for sustainability to expedite, instruct, and emphasize various agencies in implementing measures to continuously solve the PM<sub>2.5</sub> problem in 2024. Target areas are 11 protected forests, 10 reserved forests, repetitively burned agricultural areas, and particulate matter control in urban areas, which are particulate matter source controls. At the beginning of this year, the government adjusted its communication strategy by providing clear information by setting up a communication center for solving air pollution problems to communicate, warn of the particulate matter situation, advise citizens on how to behave, and point out the source of particulate matter in the area, such as burning in forest areas, rice fields, sugarcane, and corn. This information will be sent to provincial operations centers and regulatory agencies for the suppression of particulate matter sources.

Ms. Preeyaporn said that the air quality situation in Thailand has been currently entering the dust season, which resulted from high air pressure, low ventilation rates, and calm winds causing particulate matter accumulation. On January 5, 2024, the overall particulate matter situation in Bangkok and its vicinity was at a moderate level to a level starting to have an impact on health. The northern and northeastern regions were overall in good condition. As for the trend of the situation in Bangkok and its vicinity, and the lower northern region, it was necessary to monitor from 5 to 12 January 2024 due to the relatively low ventilation rate in the area. The main sources affecting the situation in Bangkok are traffic in the area and sources from outside the area, which are particulate matter from open burning in surrounding areas.

Ms. Preeyaporn said that source control required strict measurement of black smoke from diesel vehicles, particulate matter from construction zones, and exhaust ventilation from industrial factories. Moreover, there was a factor from the northeast monsoon that would make the situation in the downwind areas more severe when there was open burning in the upwind areas. Between December 29, 2023 and January 3, 2024, a total of 1,207 accumulated hot spots were found in Thailand, accounting for 38% in rice fields, 13% in sugarcane fields, 6% in corn fields, 11% in forests, 17% in other agricultural areas, and 17% in other areas. Relevant agencies must control and manage.

PCD, as a communication center for solving air pollution problems, has rehearsed operational guidelines at the local level of 76 provinces regarding communication practices to provide information to the public through various channels and coordination with provincial operations centers and regulatory agencies for supervision and monitoring of open burning. Because the particulate matter situation exceeds the standard in many areas, people should be careful of their health, reduce time spent doing outdoor activities, and use personal protective equipment. If people have health symptoms, they should consult a doctor as recommended by the Ministry of Public Health. People can follow the situation through Air4thai application and the communication center for solving air pollution problems fan page to use the information to take care of themselves and plan their lives, especially outdoor activities, Ms. Preeyaporn said.