



8. Fire

SPOTT indicators: Does the company disclose...

- | | |
|---|---|
| 53) Commitment to zero burning? | 56) Details/number of hotspots/fires in company estates? |
| 54) Zero burning commitment applies to scheme smallholders and independent suppliers? | 57) Details/number of hotspots/fires within surrounding landscape/smallholders? |
| 55) Evidence of management and monitoring fires? | |

Relevant SDGs



Context

Forest fires occur frequently in oil palm growing regions and have been responsible for the destruction of large areas of forest and biodiversity. The risk of fires is particularly high in areas with peat soils as these are highly flammable, especially once drained for agricultural use. Uncontrolled fires are often the result of slash-and-burn practices, sometimes used to clear forest for agricultural development.¹

Besides biodiversity loss, emissions resulting from land clearance by burning are a major cause of air pollution. It is estimated that there were over 120,000 active fire alerts in Indonesia in 2015, compared to 80,000 in 2014.² Fires have resulted in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of about 1.5 billion tonnes. Considering the negative effects on agriculture, forestry, trade, tourism and transportation, as well as short-term effects of the haze, the forest fires of 2015 incurred costs estimated at \$16bn to the Indonesian economy, equal to about 1.9% of its GDP.³

Concerns over climate impacts and the damaging effects of fires and haze have driven increased pressure on the paper and palm oil industries by governments. Policies to prohibit the use of fire to clear land and to monitor hotspots, as well as measures to implement these policies, are instrumental to a company's compliance and risk mitigation efforts. Such policies are also vital to protecting biodiversity and controlling GHG emissions [for more details see [factsheet 5 on Biodiversity and factsheet 9 on Greenhouse gas emissions](#)].

Obligations and expectations

In 2014, Singapore enacted the Transboundary Haze Pollution Act which stipulates that anyone who causes or contributes to haze in Singapore can be held criminally responsible even if a company is based outside the country. In response to an increase and severity in fire instances, the Indonesian government issued the Presidential Decree 15 of 2015, requiring provinces and regencies to develop their own regulations to improve fire prevention. As of 2017, one such regulation is being developed in Riau.

Many buyers of palm oil and financial institutions have put in place No Deforestation, No Peat, No Exploitation (NDPE) policies which prohibit

¹Goodman, L. K. and Mulik, K. 2015. Clearing the Air: Palm Oil, Peat Destruction, and Air Pollution. [Accessed 25 August 2017]. Available from: ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/03/clearing-the-air-ucs-2015.pdf

²Global Forest Watch Fires. Map. [Accessed 25 August 2017].

Available from: fires.globalforestwatch.org/map/#activeLayers=viirsFires%2CactiveFires&activeBasemap=topo&x=112&y=7&z=4

³Indonesia Forest Fires Cost twice as Much as Tsunami Clean-up, Says World Bank'. 2015. The Guardian. Dec 15. [Accessed 25 August 2017]. Available from: theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/15/indonesia-forest-fires-cost-twice-as-much-as-tsunami-clean-up-says-world-bank

the purchase or financing of soft commodities causing deforestation at the production level. Companies that use fire to clear forest for agricultural development may therefore be excluded by these buyers or banned from acquiring capital.

ZSL: Reporting on the delivery of fire commitments

"Many palm oil companies have shown signs of heeding increased pressure and scrutiny from governments and stakeholders following 2015's severe fire and haze crisis. This progress has been visible namely through the increased disclosure of fire prevention policies by companies, but also through increased reporting of specific implementation measures such as staff training and community outreach.

"Statistics released by Indonesia's National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) released on 25 October 2017⁴ estimated that forest fire hotspots had fallen by more than 30% when compared to the same period in 2016.

"Nevertheless, the industry needs to do more to ensure the damaging crisis of 2015 is not repeated. While 41 out of the 50 companies assessed on SPOTT commit to zero burning, only 24 companies state that they monitor fires, indicating that more evidence is needed to demonstrate that companies are delivering on their commitments."

**Izabela Delabre, Palm Oil Technical Advisor
ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON**

Challenges

- Identifying the origin of fires can be difficult as they may ignite outside of a company's concession and spread.
- Companies may not be at fault for a fire but can still be held responsible if it spreads into their land.
- It can be difficult for companies to identify fires as hotspot data is not always accurate.
- Whilst the practice of slash-and-burn is illegal in Indonesia, there is an exemption for smallholders who have traditionally used fire for clearing land.



⁴Hot spots from forest fires in Indonesia fell 32.6 % in 2017'. Channel News Asia. [Accessed on 3 November 2017]. Available from: channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/hot-spots-from-forest-fires-in-indonesia-fell-32-6-in-2017-9343192

Best practice for fire reduction

There are several steps that a palm oil company should follow to implement best practice:

- Commit to zero burning and adopt a zero burning policy.
- Adopt and publish policies including the development of a fire management plan.
- As fires may ignite outside a company's concession, companies should engage with communities living around the concession and develop fire prevention and detection protocols with them.
- Set up a fire alert system and communicate daily reports to help companies get up-to-date information and act instantly.
- Train all employees on fire safety and ensure a designated firefighting force is on alert.
- Companies should record and report any occurrences of fires/hotspots to ensure adequate future management and monitor progress.
- To ensure compliance with the policy throughout the supply chain, companies should monitor suppliers and engage or exclude them if they are found to be in violation of the policy.
- Companies that operate in Indonesia can become members of the Fire Free Alliance, a voluntary initiative to share knowledge and resources on tackling fires.
- Companies can use Global Forest Watch (GFW) Fires which provides maps and summaries of current and recent fires and also provides fire alerts via email.

Recommended resources

- Fire Free Alliance. [Accessed 25 August 2017]. Available from: firefreealliance.org/
- Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. 2012. RSPO Manual on Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Existing Oil Palm Cultivation on Peat. Kuala Lumpur: RSPO. Available from: sustainability-college.rspo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Manual-on-BMPs-for-Existing-Oil-Palm-Cultivation-on-Peat-English.pdf
- Ceres. 2017. Reporting Guidance on Responsible Palm. Available from: ceres.org/resources/reports/reporting-guidance-responsible-palm

Other SPOTT indicator framework factsheets in the series

This document is part of a series of factsheets in the publication: *From disclosure to engagement: A guide to the SPOTT indicator framework for assessing palm oil producers and traders*. Below is a full list of the factsheets:

- Factsheet 1: Sustainability policy and leadership
- Factsheet 2: Landbank and maps
- Factsheet 3: Traceability
- Factsheet 4: Deforestation
- Factsheet 5: Biodiversity
- Factsheet 6: HCV, HCS and impact assessment
- Factsheet 7: Peat
- Factsheet 8: Fire
- Factsheet 9: Greenhouse gas emissions
- Factsheet 10: Water
- Factsheet 11: Chemical and pest management
- Factsheet 12: Community and land rights
- Factsheet 13: Labour rights
- Factsheet 14: Palm oil certification
- Factsheet 15: Smallholder support
- Factsheet 16: Supplier selection
- Factsheet 17: Governance and grievances

About SPOTT

SPOTT is an online platform promoting transparency and accountability to drive implementation of environmental and social best practice for the sustainable production and trade of global commodities. SPOTT assessments score some of the largest palm oil producers and traders on the public availability of corporate information relating to environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues.

Reframed as the **Sustainability Policy Transparency Toolkit** in 2017, SPOTT now supports transparency for other industries that pose some of the greatest risks to the environment, with SPOTT assessments of timber, pulp and paper companies launched in November 2017.

For more information, visit [SPOTT.org](https://spott.org) or contact SPOTT@ZSL.org.

About ZSL

Founded in 1826, the **Zoological Society of London (ZSL)** is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity whose mission is to promote and achieve the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats.

Our mission is realised through our groundbreaking science, our active conservation projects in more than 50 countries and our two Zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo.

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