

AML Employees Help Extinguish Indonesian Coal Fires

As an employee of the North Dakota Public Service Commission's Abandoned Mine Lands Division, I had the opportunity to work with Office of Surface Mining (OSM) and state AML employees on a technical assistance project in Indonesia. This joint project of OSM and the Indonesian Ministry of Mines and Energy resulted in suppression of dangerous coal outcrop fires in East Kalimantan, a province located on the island of Borneo. Forest fires, accentuated by extremely dry conditions associated with the El Niño effect, ignited many exposed coal seams. These coal outcrop fires were a serious danger to the Indonesian public - burning near major highways, homes, at least one school, mosque and a cemetery. They also threatened to ignite subsequent forest fires. More than eighty outcrop fires were burning in a relatively small area in East Kalimantan.

Al Whitehouse, OSM Indonesian Project Director, and Richard Miller, OSM International Projects Coordinator, assembled a team of Indonesians, Malaysians, and Americans with experience in coal and peat fire management. This team met initially in November 1998 at Pittsburgh to evaluate information on the coal fires in East Kalimantan and design a coal fire suppression course and pilot projects.

On January 28, 1999, Nancy Roberts (OSM-Ashland, KY), Bernie Maynard (OSM-Pittsburgh, PA) and Eric Coberly (WV Division of Environmental Protection) arrived in Indonesia. Nancy and Bernie, together with several representatives from Indonesia and Malaysia, conducted classroom training in coal fire characterization and suppression. Eric worked with Indonesian government officials and contractors to extinguish a large and dangerous coal outcrop fire near a major highway approximately 24 km south of the Capitol City of Samarinda. They left Kalimantan on March 5 for some well deserved R&R, at their own expense, on the island of Bali and then returned home.

Steve Jones (PA Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation) arrived in Indonesia February 21. Together with Indonesian counterparts he extinguished two dangerous coal fires burning alongside the Samarinda-Balikpapan Highway, the only road between these important cities. Steve then worked on coal fires near the village of Lempake, just north of Samarinda and about 100 km south of the equator. Extremely steep sideslopes and the proximity of a mosque and cemetery complicated suppression plans for outcrop fires on either side of the Lempake Road. After nearly two months work on coal fires on Kalimantan, Steve reunited with his wife Marty on April 13 for a few days of vacation on Bali before heading home.

After arriving in Indonesia March 19, I worked together with Steve on the Lempake Road fires and another dangerous coal outcrop fire burning near an elementary school at Lempake. Governor of East Kalimantan, Suarna Abdul Fatah, visited us at the Lempake sites on March 29. I continued work on the five coal fires near Lempake until leaving Kalimantan on April 21. After attending meetings at the US Embassy in Jakarta, I returned to North Dakota on April 25.

This project was a great success. In addition to providing classroom training in coal fire suppression, the American team assisted in the suppression of eight dangerous coal outcrop fires. Our Indonesian counterparts are continuing the good work. We appreciated this opportunity to share our skills and also returned with experiences that may help in our jobs at home. In addition to those already mentioned, special thanks to the following people that helped make this project a success: Ed Carey and Allen Kraps (OSM-Pittsburgh), Marty King (OSM-Washington), Robin McClellan (US Embassy, Jakarta) Nordin Bin Pauzi and Hamdan Bin Arshad (Malaysia), and Eppy Parma, Dede Suhendra, Prawiranto Wibowo, Asep Mulyana, Istiardi, Afkar, Arifin and many others from the Republic of Indonesia.

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Captions for Photos

[Indonesia 2](#)

Excavation of burning coal from an outcrop fire beside the Lampake Road.

[Indonesia 3](#)

Completed Lempake Road Fire Site.