



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Forest Fires: Management and International Cooperation
in Preventing Forest Fires in APEC Region**

(4-6 October 2010, Khabarovsk, Russia)

«KHABAROVSK RECOMMENDATIONS»

on Management and International Cooperation in Preventing Forest Fires in APEC Region

Introduction

The International Conference “Forest Fires: Management and International Cooperation in Preventing Forest Fires in APEC Region” was convened at the initiative of the Russian Federation and aimed to strengthen cooperation between the emergency services of the APEC member economies in order to express readiness of the region to reduce the risks of disasters.

53 representatives from 8 APEC member economies and key experts from the world took part in this event.

The subject of forest fire prevention under the APEC activities has been raised and considered for the first time. Primarily, this is due to the fact that in the context of the ongoing process of climate change, forest fires have become a growing problem globally and particularly in the APEC region and require mobilization of the international community to devise measures to prevent them.

Objectives of the Conference

1. Providing an opportunity for the emergency services of APEC member economies to share their experience in forest fires risk management both in research and practical activities;
2. Enhancing regional cooperation and verify the general similarities and differences in order to avoid duplication of efforts;
3. Developing a mechanism of cooperation and coordination between the emergency services of the APEC economies in forest fires management at local and regional levels.

Major Topics for Discussion

During the conference, the delegates exchanged knowledge and experience on the following topics:

- Experience in fighting forest fires;
- Forest management and its role in prevention of forest fires;
- Forest fire control;
- Technical means of detection, monitoring and suppression of forest fires;
- Problem of combating illegal and non-sustainable forest management in the context of forest fire prevention;
- Development of international cooperation in fire management.

Results of the Discussion

Through the in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the problem of forest fires in the APEC region and the world, the conference identified the urgent necessity and importance of joint efforts, mutual help and cross-border cooperation in forest fire risk reduction. The conference delegates discussed catastrophic destruction and long-term influence of forest fires on ecosystem stability, environment, economy, health, biomass, climate change, livelihoods and communities. In support of the APEC agenda of “Secure Growth” the delegates concluded that investments are needed to reduce the threat of forest fires to human security. Regional cooperation should be encouraged for capacity building in fire management, best practices, emergency preparedness, technology, early warning, information and post-fire recovery. In particular, the following major aspects of sustainable fire management were identified:

- In view of global climate change it is expected that the duration of periods of extreme forest fire danger, the risk of extreme wildfire intensities and severities, and area burned by forest fires will substantially increase, and a rise of the threat of extreme and disastrous forest fires are anticipated;
- Illegal, disorderly and uncontrolled forest utilization provides the ground for increasing wildfire hazard and the risk of ignition of forest fires;
- Uncontrolled use of fire in land-use practices in some economies of the region results in escaped fires and excessive emissions of greenhouse gases that accelerates regional and global climate change;
- The effects of smoke pollution from land-use fires and wildfires are increasingly affecting human health and security;
- Existing national fire management systems are not able to cope with the increased risk of forest fires and this situation may lead to disastrous economic, social and environmental consequences.
- Fires lead to negative changes in the habitat of a number of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna, such as the Amur tiger in boreal Northeast Asia and the orangutan in tropical Southeast Asia;
- Increased threat of disastrous forest fires that requires a substantial revision of forest policies, including review of the priorities, adaptation of the programs for forest fire prevention and suppression, monitoring systems, changes in some legislative and institutional aspects of forest management, such as policies limiting access to the forests;
- Prevention of forest fires and implementing good practice management of fire in land use is one of most effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the destruction of forests, other vegetation cover and biodiversity. Therefore, national programs of adaptation to climate change, sustainable forest management and nature conservation should include forest fire management as one of the crucial components for current and future sustainable forest management;
- In view of the ever increasing connectedness of environmental and economic activities in the region, and considering the seasonal differences of periods of high fire risk in the APEC region, there are options for APEC economies to assist each other in fighting forest fires.
- At international (global) level existing partnerships, informal and legal agreements on cooperation in fire management between countries and regions, e.g. the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Global Wildland Fire Network under the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), are demanding for establishment of inter-regional dialogue and development of a common goal of action, e.g. a global agreement on cooperation in fire management.

Recommendations of the Conference:

Based on the aforementioned considerations, the following priority directions of international cooperation under APEC are proposed by the delegates of the conference, and also considered in the further development of fire management within the individual APEC economies:

1. *Development of an international mechanism to monitor and enhance responsibility of the APEC member economies to ensure forest fire protection on their territories, and coordinate action under APEC with the existing institutions of international cooperation, such as UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network, ASEAN, UNECE and others.*
2. *Promotion of economic cooperation in projects that aim to reduce the degree of fire risk and restoration of forests on lands degraded by fire and non-sustainable forest management;*
3. *Support projects of forest fire prevention on the areas of fire-sensitive High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF), especially in the habitats of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna; and projects developing methods of integration of natural and prescribed management fires in fire-dependent or -adapted ecosystems.*
4. *Improvement and development of observation systems based on advanced high-resolution satellite instruments for early detection and monitoring of forest fires, as well as mechanisms supporting the operational use of the results of monitoring information in fire suppression operations, and for environmental and economic damage assessment.*
5. *Improvement of firefighting equipment and professional skills for its effective use, to be developed through joint training and exercises based on regionally and internationally agreed competency-based training standards for firefighters, and application of a compatible incident management system that contributes to the success of international cooperation in forest fire emergencies.*
6. *Development of bilateral agreements on cooperation in fire management, particularly between APEC economies sharing common borders, and a regional voluntary agreement on cooperation in fire management, aiming at harmonizing cooperation with neighboring regional entities such as the UNECE and ASEAN, particularly in the light of overlapping membership of some economies.*
7. *Development of long-term fire management strategies in each economy that allow for the mitigation of the consequences of climate change.*
8. *Support of fire science addressing the consequences of economic, demographic, environmental and climate change on fire regimes and vulnerability of ecosystems and society, including methods of evaluation of social, environmental and economic damages from forest fires.*
9. *Improvement of strategic and operational early warning of forest fire risk in the APEC region as a regional activity to be coordinated with the Global Wildland Fire Early Warning system.*
10. *Improvement of public awareness on forest fire threats and responsibility of civil society to prevent wildfires.*
11. *Development of methodological recommendations for assessing forest fire impacts on environment, ecology and economics of APEC economies.*
12. *Improvement of enforcement strategies of forest fire protection, including addressing the impacts of illegal use of forest resources (in the frame of FLEG initiative).*
13. *Conduct regular consultations, and exchange knowledge and best practices informed by a high level of expertise within directions of APEC.*
14. *Reconvene and contributing to the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference scheduled for 2011 (South Africa), and the following conference scheduled for 2015 (South Korea).*