



INTERVENTION 2

Forest Fires and Land Clearance

SUMMARY

In contrast to seasonal burning of farmland, many cities and regions are impacted by frequent dry-season fires in forests and undeveloped land. Some of the forest fires are natural, started by lightning or other accidental causes. However, many of the fires are started deliberately, either by farmers using slash-and-burn approaches in order to open new land or by corporations to clear forest land for expanding plantations. Legislation usually exists to prevent or constrain this practice, but it has proven very difficult to enforce in most places.

Air Quality and Health benefits: Would be medium to high if burning could be stopped completely.

Carbon benefits: Could be medium to high because of the amounts of black carbon released.

Costs: In theory, the costs of not burning are very low. However, the foregone costs to the perpetrators are high and, therefore, they resist efforts to control the burning.

Feasibility: Very difficult. Violence is often used against those trying to prevent the burning.

Key players: Private interests are reported to be the main drivers of the fires in many cases.

EXAMPLES

AMAZON. The fires in the past year have impacted air quality in many cities in Brazil and neighboring countries. Despite major efforts, control of the fires has been poor.

THAILAND AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. Every year, small- and large-scale burning in the region results in widespread haze and serious health impacts. Thailand, Indonesia, and other countries have programs to react to the fires but prevention has been weak.