

How washing cars in wetlands can be costly

BY Samuel Balagadde

Joseph Tebandeke, a taxi driver on Kampala-Jinja road, said his car was once impounded for having a faded number plate and he had to get a replacement before it was released. He said though the replacement cost is only sh137,000, the process of getting it was cumbersome. "If you are not the registered owner of the vehicle, you have to first foot the transfer bill of sh105,000 and then trace the registered owner or go through the court system if the owner cannot be traced," he said. "My taxi van was grounded for a full month while I processed the document for acquiring the duplicate registration number plate," said Tebandeke. There have been public complaints raised to the works and transport ministry that the companies contracted by the Government to print car and motorcycle registration number plates were producing substandard products. Motorists, particularly taxi drivers, have decried rampant arrests and penalties by traffic police over faded registration number plates, forcing them



Commuter taxis being washed at Port Bell which is a wetland

to respray them with black paint for visibility, which is also contrary to the traffic laws. However, Eng. Charles Buyonga, a senior mechanical engineer with the Ministry of Works and Transport who also handles the registration of number plates for government vehicles, said fading plates are partly a result of washing bays in wetlands. Many washing

bays use contaminated water with sand particles that bleach the car number plates and body as well. Car registration number plates are printed by Arnold Brooklyn and Tumpeco, which were contracted by the Government. Buyonga said the materials on which car registration number plates are printed are of good quality, imported from Germany and that those

that fade are as a result of poor handling and exposure to detergents. He said sometimes the unprofessional removal of number plates by the traffic police when enforcing their mandate among the errant drivers, also causes damage, particularly if they are not stored properly, leading to scratches that facilitate faster fading. "The traffic police should



Charles Ssebambulidde

devise other ways of handling errant drivers than removing registration number plates as it also compromises their quality," Buyonga said. Charles Ssebambulidde, the traffic police spokesperson says motorists should always supervise the washing of their vehicles. He said some washing bays innocently apply bleaching detergents on vehicles that result into fading car registration number plates. "Faded car registration number plates are a security threat as some criminals take advantage of that," Ssebambulidde said. He also said washing cars in cheap places exposes

them to theft. Some workers at washing bays conspire to steal cars after getting duplicate keys or vehicles they are given to wash. Ssebambulidde also warned motorists of the adverse effects on the vehicles. Francis Amodoi was a victim of such.

His joy after importing his dream Vauxhall Vivaro 1.9 DTI van was dampened at a car washing bay. Immediately after going through the cumbersome and costly process of car registration that involves payment for demurrage and the car import duties, he took it for thorough cleaning before driving home. On starting the vehicle after washing the engine started producing fumes and smoke. Later it was diagnosed that they had poured water into the car body mobiliser that controls the car ignition system. Being a rare car, Amodoi had no option but to push it to a nearby Police post in Bugoloobi where he parked it for some time as he ordered for parts from the UK. "The system cost me dearly as it involved getting another key as it is directly connected to the system. Car interior only requires mopping than open water," said Amodoi.