

Experts warn of mass soil pollution

BY PAUL TAJUBA
ptajuba@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. Ugandan soils are getting polluted with chemicals which are depleting the soil fertility, lessening bee population and killing other important microorganisms, the National Environment Management Authority (Nema), has warned.

Ms Christine Akello, the Nema deputy executive director, said the country is fast turning to agricultural and industrial chemicals and with the current poor disposal, they are ending up in the environment, killing off useful microorganisms.

"Our soils are getting choked," Ms Akello said last Wednesday in Kampala during a conference on management of chemicals.

The summit was organised by Nema and Environmental Management for Livelihood Improvement Bwaise Facility (EMLI), a non-governmental organisation.

Ms Akello said in areas where flowers are being farmed, it has been observed that the bee population is reducing and this has had an impact on plant pollination, which in turn affect crop productivity.

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"When you use chemicals to get rid of weeds or pests, the chemical washes off into the soils. These chemicals do not only kill the pests or weeds you are intending to get rid of but also kills the microorganisms in soils. These microorganisms are useful to ensure the particles in soils breakdown into humus which will make the soils fertile," she added.

Ms Akello said Ugandans are being exposed to toxic chemicals at various levels depending on where they live or work.

The most common toxic chemicals people are exposed, according to Nema are bioaccumulative, and toxic substances such as persistent organic pollutants (POPs), heavy metals such as cadmium, lead, mercury, and endocrine disrupting chemicals such as dioxins released by burning of household waste and bush burning.

Ms Akello recommended the use of organic manure from chicken droppings, cow dung.

Mr Enock Sekuubwa, the EMLI vice chairperson, said there is urgent need "to increase the capacity of environmentally sound management of chemicals and hazards" in the country.

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