

Hazardous

Chemicals

Standards

UNBS

By Carol Kasujja

The next time you need to use toilet paper, watch out, it might expose you to cancer, the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) has warned. The standards body said most toilet paper on the market contains chemicals that are hazardous to the body.

"Toilet paper, napkins and facial tissues are sanitary papers, personal products that need to be clean and hygienic. However, results from a survey carried out by UNBS between January 2017 and March 2018 show that both the imported and locally made toilet paper does not comply with UNBS standards.

Manufacturers and sellers store the products on the floor, the production areas are dirty, hence exposing the product to unhygienic conditions," Sarah Nantongo, a surveillance officer at UNBS, said.

Nantongo said some of the colouring dyes used in the manufacturing of toilet paper had been found to cause allergic reactions, such as irritation of the skin.

"Manufacturers use too much chlorine while making the paper white, which process creates cancer-causing chemicals like dioxins and furans," Nantongo said.

Imported toilet paper that was tested and failed to meet the standards includes Piao Piao, one of the most used in Uganda, which also had the highest failure rate.

The report shows that the toilet paper had a higher total plate count (more microbiological organisms) than the recommended specifications. The microbiological organisms, according to UNBS senior standards officer Prossy Nabaggala, can cause itching and candidiasis, whose re-occurrence can lead to cancer.

In their defence, Tom Ojore, the legal manager of Piao Piao toilet paper made by

Cancer-causing toilet paper floods market



One of the participants Tom Ojore Ochlieng, addressing manufacturers with issues related to the toilet paper industry. This was during the UNBS stakeholders meeting yesterday. Photos by Godiver Asege

Simbaland Limited, said they failed to meet the standards because their brand had been duplicated by local manufacturers.

"As manufacturers, we make sure that our brand meets the standard and we work closely with UNBS inspectors, but the local manufacturers who have duplicated our brand are the reason for the negative publicity. We are going to sue those companies that are forging our trademark," Ojore said.

BETWEEN THE LINES

During the meeting, manufacturers agreed to form an association to share tips and monitor themselves so that they can meet the standard.

The warning comes after the watchdog impounded several tonnes of toilet paper rolls that were on sale in various supermarkets around

Kampala. Others were picked from Kikubo, the downtown hub for merchandise, streets and other distribution outlets. People who buy toilet paper from the streets are particularly at risk of purchasing the hazardous toilet paper, according to Nantongo.

"Following the challenges we have with the toilet paper industry in Uganda, we are requesting the public, especially motorists, to stay away from buying toilet paper from hawkers who move



Patricia Bagelne Ejalu

around from street to street with rolls of white toilet paper," Patricia Ejalu, the deputy executive director of UNBS said.

"Batch number is still a nightmare in most of the toilet papers on the market. Some of the sheets cannot easily be torn off during usage. So, we have called all manufacturers and importers for a meeting so that we sensitise them. If they do not cooperate, we are going to collect all the tissue on the market," Ejalu said.

During the meeting, manufacturers agreed to form an association to share tips and also monitor themselves so that they can meet the standard.

"UNBS needs to name and shame some of the brands that are not meeting the standard, but also manufacturers should form an association for self-regulation," Gyavira Musoke, a quality consultant, said.

"Women should be more vigilant because they are the

most affected. Most women complain of rashes in their private, and this mainly because of toilet paper is," Dr Humphrey Lwanga, a gynaecologist and obstetrician from the Ministry of Health, said.

Lwanga also noted that though there are many other causes of cancer, cervical cancer these days is also linked to dangerous toilet paper people use.

Dangerous toilet paper

Good quality locally manufactured toilet paper should have a UNBS mark.

Ejalu said if one opens the roll and it produces dust, do not use it. It is dangerous.

In his presentation, Dr Lwanga said skin irritation of the anus and vulva is one of the effects after of the body's contact with hazardous toilet paper dyes, fragrances and additives.

"Unscented, thinner, cheaper and more greyish looking toilet papers is less likely to contain additives," he explained.

"Many people want to use the softest and the whitest paper possible. But the truth is, this kind of paper is the most toxic for the body. The toxic substances enter through our skin and get into our blood," Lwanga said.

According to the Uganda Cancer Institute, over 4,000 new cancer cases were registered in Uganda last year, with prostate cancer ranking high in men whereas breast and cervical cancer was leading in women.

Out of every 100,000 people in Uganda, 300 are suspected to have cancer.

The World Health Organisation states that globally, nearly one in six deaths are due to cancer and approximately 70% of deaths from cancer occur in low and middle-income countries.