

Ministry admits use of poor electricity poles

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KAMPALA. The Ministry of Energy has directed the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) to explain the use of substandard wooden poles on some rural electrification lines.

Though Energy State minister Simon D'Ujanga said it is a "small thing, which can be fixed easily", he added that REA is doing an audit.

"I have asked them (REA) to investigate how sub-standard poles get on to the network," Mr D'Ujanga said in an interview yesterday.

He did not explain when he will get the audit report although he said REA is innocent.

"Those are problems of standards. There must be a standards person... That is a mistake by somebody who did not do his work," he said.

Whereas it is the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) duty to ensure the products on the local market are of good quality, it is yet to come up with a standard for electricity poles.

As such, many poles do not carry a sticker issued by the bureau. A plausible reason for the use of substandard poles is to increase margins.

Whereas a treated pole costs about Shs720,000, a painted one can be bought for less than Shs360,000.

Regardless of whether one is connected through treated or painted poles, he or she will pay between Shs400,000 and Shs1.2m in rural electrification service territory.

Uganda Electricity Transmission Company Limited document says treated electricity poles last up to 28 years, metallic ones 31 years and concrete poles 47 years. Painted poles probably last less than 28 years.

In 2016, this newspaper reported the Uganda's main electricity distribution company, Umeme Limited, partly attributed power outages to rotting electricity poles.