

DEADLY COOKING OIL ON THE MARKET

PHOTO BY SHAMIM SAAD

BY CAROL KASUJJA

Tonnes of deadly cooking oil have been released onto the market without certification, according to an investigation by the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS).

UNBS surveillance department arrested a group of people recently involved in the siphoning of crude cooking oil, before selling it to restaurants and food vendors.

THE RACKET

Following complaints from the public about the quality of some cooking oil on the market, UNBS launched an investigation into the matter. They worked with Police in Bugiri, the centre of the illicit practice, to net the people involved.

For one month, the UNBS team used locals from Bugiri to get the suspects. During the investigation, they found seals, stickers, labels and caps at different residences. And some of the people involved in the act were Police officers, youth and drivers.

"This oil is imported into the country from Mombasa as a raw material and is supposed to be delivered to manufacturing industries for further refining before being released onto the market.

But some unscrupulous people siphon the oil from the tankers, package it in containers of known brand names and sell it to unsuspecting members of the public around Naluwerere, Mbale, Jinja, Bugiri, Namutumba, and Budaka districts," Jackson Mubangizi, the UNBS surveillance manager, said.

TOXICANTS

Mubangizi noted that they picked samples of the cooking oil from bakeries and fast food outlets and took them to the testing laboratory and the results indicated that the oil had chlorpyrifos, benzaldehyde, phenol, vanillin and naphthalene.

"The sample failed to meet the



UNBS surveillance officer Peter Abongu displaying confiscated jerrycans from Bugiri district used for processing crude oil

HOW TO SPOT FAKE COOKING OIL

Godwin Muhwezi, the UNBS spokesperson, says most of the fake oil is darker than the real cooking oil. Because they boil it again and add unknown materials, it does not turn out clearly.

- When you open the jerrycan and find no aluminium seal, just know it is tampered with and it is dangerous for your health.
- The cooking oil smells bad because of the ingredients they add and dirty jerrycans are used.
- The labels on the jerrycans have grammatical errors.
- Broken seal on the mouth of the jerrycans.

requirements for the moisture and volatile and acid value and was found to contain camphor, an organic compound used as an insect repellent. It can cause skin redness and irritation. Naphthalene is used as a household fumigant

- During packing, most of the criminals forget the labeling. Usually there is no clear manufacture and expiry dates and ingredients are not indicated.
- Genuine cooking oil from Uganda has a sign from UNBS that shows it is certified, if it is from Kenya, it has to have a diamond mark and TBS mark from Tanzania.
- It is sold cheaply compared to the genuine one.
- They illegally use well-known brand names, which are pasted on the jerrycans in form of stickers or other methods for deceiving unsuspecting users.

against insects, exposure to it can lead to nausea, dizziness, vomiting, blood in the urine and a yellow colour on the skin," said Mubangizi.

According to the test results, the cooking oil had phenol, a toxic compound used as an antiseptic

and disinfectant, which can cause damage to the heart, kidneys, liver and lungs.

Chlorpyrifos can result in eye watering, increased saliva and sweating, headache and impaired vision.

"Taking extremely high concentrations of phenol causes muscle tremors, difficulty in walking and death," reads the report.

"We are wondering why people are dying of cancer but some of the chemicals we found in the cooking oil could be causing cancer. What is sad is that the oil is sold cheaply and because of the high poverty levels, there are ready markets," Vincent Ochwo, the UNBS principal surveillance officer, said.

UNBS warns the public about substandard cooking oil on the market. Muhwezi said more operations are going to be carried out to ensure the market is rid of substandard goods.

"We cannot compromise on health matters, we shall arrest them," he said.