

An investigation into substandard alcoholic drinks has implicated officials from Rwanda's food and drugs regulator, standards body and local government, with 18 people arrested as authorities widen a crackdown on products that fail to meet safety requirements.

The suspects, presented to journalists on Thursday, include 10 employees of the Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority (Rwanda FDA), three officials from the Rwanda Standards Board (RSB) and local government officials, according to the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB).

RIB spokesperson Dr. Thierry B. Murangira said Rwanda FDA's Director General, Prof. Bienvenu Emile, is among those arrested.



He is accused of issuing a certificate without first consulting the authority's technical committee, RIB said.

Murangira cited an inspection of a factory in which investigators reportedly found a badly rusted processing machine but the facility was later granted a certificate.

"Yatanze ibyangombwa atagishije inama akanama gashinzwe tekiniki," Murangira said.

Other Rwanda FDA officials named by RIB include Dr. Nyirimigabo Eric, head of the food department; Dr. Nyamwasa, an inspector; Mahoro Christian, responsible for licensing businesses involved in food-related activities; and Muhimpundu Alice, a warehouse inspection specialist.

Three RSB officials are also accused of improperly issuing S-Mark certificates to products from 18 companies that did not meet the required standards, RIB said.

Murangira said investigators found products bearing the S-Mark even though other products from the same companies did not have the required certification.

The investigation has also reached local government.

Among those arrested are Gasana Isai, executive secretary of Kansi Sector in Gisagara District, and Kubwimana Emmanuel, a village leader in Murundi Sector, Karongi District.

RIB said some local officials were linked to bars selling substandard alcoholic drinks, while others were allegedly involved in helping residents conceal the products.

Rwanda National Police spokesperson ACP Boniface Rutikanga said local officials have a duty to ensure that businesses comply with regulations and that permits are used in accordance with the law.

The arrests come as Rwanda steps up its campaign against illicit and substandard alcoholic drinks, amid concerns over the consumption of strong alcoholic products and their potential impact on consumers, particularly young people.

Authorities have also taken action against some alcoholic drinks imported from the region, including Konyagi, Kiwingu and Bond 7.

RIB said its investigations found that some factories had continued producing alcoholic drinks without meeting regulatory requirements despite inspections by officials responsible for enforcing standards.

The agency said 104 people have so far been arrested across the country in connection with the production and distribution of substandard alcoholic drinks.

The 18 suspects remain under investigation. RIB said those convicted could face prison sentences of between seven and 10 years, depending on the offenses for which they are found guilty.

Murangira urged members of the public to report places where withdrawn substandard alcoholic drinks may still be sold or stored, saying information from the public would help authorities remove the products from the market.