

*By Jeje Muhinde;*

The Ministry of Environment and Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) have announced tough fines as high as Rwf10 to Rwf75 million for anyone violating the ban on single use plastics.

As the government prepares to implement the ban on single use of plastics, importers, retailers, and users have been warned that they will face serious consequences if they breach the new law N° 17/2019 of 10/08/.

From October 2019, the government granted dealers a grace period of three months to clear out their stock before they start to impose fines.

Dr Jeanne d'Arce Mujawamariya, the Minister of Environment on Wednesday this week told the media, "Government was supposed to enforce the fines since the beginning of this month. If they don't comply starting from now, they will face heavy fines"

Single-use plastic containers refer to those made using plastic or polystyrene, and included cups, food containers, forks, knives and takeaways, egg trays used in the culinary retail industry.

Dealers have been advised to turn to alternatives products such as paper straws and stirrers. plastic forks, spoons, knives, plates, cups can be replaced by reusable ceramics and containers.

Plastic advertisement, fliers, and cheering materials used at stadiums and big gathering can be replaced paper or compostable materials as well as digital billboards.

Mujawamariya noted that plastic toothbrushes can be replaced with plant-based or wooden ones, mentioning, "Consumers should use reusable glasses or plastic bottles, water dispensers instead of using the single-use plastic bottles"

It was outlined that manufacturers of single-use plastic products if nabbed will be banned from operating, guilty and liable to administrative fines of Rwf 10million.

It was also noted that wholesalers guilty of selling single-use of the plastic product will be subjected to fines of Rwf 700,000, on top of the confiscation of their products.

Those caught discarding such products will be fined Rwf 50,000, while retailers will be fined with Rwf300,000 and their products, will be apprehended. Corporates that are caught breaching the law will be paying a heavy fine of Rwf 5 million on top of losing their trade licenses.

“This is to ensure that importers bring in the kind of products that are in compliance with what the Government is seeking to achieve,” Minister said, adding that single-use plastic products have negative environmental and human health effects

She mentioned, “Researchers say that when people consume hot food and beverages in contact with plastics, they risk getting exposed to different diseases because of toxic components from plastics leach into your food,”

Scientists have said that the number of people suffering from kidney and throat ailments, cancer and infertility have been increasing over the years. The rise in such cases is attributed largely to people eating hot food carried in plastic bags.

Coletha Ruhamy, the Director-General of REMA, also mentioned that manufacturers can produce plastic products that don't have immediate alternatives replacements for such single-use of plastics materials on the market because in Rwanda there are only six recycling firms and the companies recycle only 10 percent of plastics.

Among such businesses are those that use single-use plastic bottles. It was announced that they will have to come up with a recycling and waste collection plan and incentives in order to continue in business.

However, wholesalers like David Habimana in Kimironko market says the fines outlined are too high for sellers.

“I have serious concerns about the hefty fines for infringements on the ban on plastics beyond the given date. I believe those fines are too high. You could have made two separate stipulations—well it applies to the importers and manufacturers and for the sellers. Charging the wholesalers Rwf 10million is fine, but I am not.