

Rwanda is stepping up enforcement against producers and distributors of illicit alcoholic beverages after contaminated drinks killed 50 people and left more than 100 others with serious health complications, including blindness, during the first seven months of 2026.

The deaths have prompted authorities to tighten inspections, expand public awareness campaigns and strengthen coordination among government agencies as they seek to curb the growing public health threat posed by unsafe alcohol.

Speaking after a national meeting that brought together provincial governors, district leaders, security agencies and government ministries on Wednesday, Local Government Minister Dominique Habimana said the response would combine tougher law enforcement with efforts to discourage excessive alcohol consumption, particularly among young people.



Local Government Minister Dominique Habimana

Authorities have already seized and destroyed nearly 900,000 litres of substandard alcoholic beverages this year, but officials say illegal production remains widespread.

More than 100 people continue to suffer health complications linked to contaminated alcohol, including residents of Bugesera District who lost their eyesight after consuming toxic drinks.

Habimana said alcohol abuse extends beyond its immediate health effects, contributing to domestic violence, school dropouts, child malnutrition and unemployment.

He also said authorities would intensify operations against those manufacturing and distributing illicit alcohol, adding that offenders would face severe legal penalties.

Government officials disclosed that some local leaders are also under investigation over their alleged involvement in the production or distribution of unsafe alcoholic beverages, though no names or further details were released.

The crackdown follows the introduction of new regulations governing the commercial production of traditional beverages such

as **urwagwa**, **ikigage** and **ubushera**.

Under the rules, producers intending to sell the beverages commercially or serve them at large public events must obtain government authorization, while beverages prepared for household consumption remain exempt.

The regulations were introduced after repeated cases of poisoning linked to commercially produced traditional drinks, incidents that have increasingly raised concerns among health authorities.

Officials say the latest measures are intended to improve oversight of traditional beverage production while reducing deaths and illnesses associated with contaminated alcohol.