

# FG seals Plateau mine after gas leak kills 37

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The Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake...PHOTO: X (Dele Alake)

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The Federal Government has ordered the immediate closure of a mining site in Plateau State after about 37 villagers reportedly died from inhaling toxic gases during artisanal mining activities.

*PUNCH Metro* gathered from a post by security analyst Zagazola Makama on X on Wednesday that 25 other persons were hospitalised after exposure to suspected carbon monoxide at the mining site in Zurak, located in Wase Local Government Area.

According to the report, the victims—mostly young men aged between 20 and 35—were carrying out routine underground mining operations when they inhaled toxic gases believed to have accumulated in poorly ventilated tunnels.

Following the incident, the Minister of Solid Minerals Development, Dele Alake, directed that all activities within Mining Licence 11810, operated by Solid Unit Nigeria Limited, be suspended after the tragedy in the Zurak community of Wase LGA.

The licence, owned by Abdullahi Dan-China, lies between longitudes 10.34.45 and 10.35.50 and latitudes 9.13.45 and 9.14.40.

The minister gave the directives in a statement issued on Wednesday by the Special Assistant on Media to the minister, Segun Tomori, in Abuja.

Tomori said the minister was on a condolence call to the Plateau State Governor, Caleb Mutfwang, where he expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives and described the victims as “innocent citizens

trying to earn a living.”

Alake urged the governor to convey his solidarity to the affected community.

“The minister sympathised with the governor over the loss of the innocent citizens who died while trying to earn a living and urged him to convey his deep sorrow and solidarity with the people of Wase over the irreparable loss,” the statement read.

The minister has also dispatched a high-level investigative team led by the permanent secretary in the ministry, Yusuf Yabo, to determine both the immediate and remote causes of the incident and recommend sanctions.

The team, according to the statement, includes experts in mining, environmental compliance and artisanal and small-scale mining cooperatives.

“The minister has dispatched a team of officials and investigators to probe the remote and immediate causes of the incident and recommend appropriate sanctions,” the statement noted.

“The team also includes experts in mining, environmental compliance and artisanal cooperatives. The minister is coordinating the team and support services to ensure effective management of the situation.”

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Officials said the Federal Government would make further disclosures as investigations progress.

Preliminary findings indicated that the company had allegedly ceded the abandoned pit to the host community following agitation by villagers seeking economic opportunities and empowerment.

The area, it was gathered, was an abandoned lead mining site containing mineral deposits prone to emissions of sulphuric oxide gas.

Unaware of the toxic nature of the site, the villagers reportedly engaged in manual extraction while inhaling the poisonous emissions, leading to the fatal incident.

The tragedy highlights the growing risks associated with abandoned mining pits across Nigeria, especially in rural communities where economic hardship pushes residents into informal mining

without adequate safety awareness.

PUNCH Metro reports that this development further underscores the persistent challenge of illegal and artisanal mining in Nigeria, which has become both an economic lifeline for many communities and a major safety and environmental concern.

Over the years, abandoned mining sites in parts of Plateau, Zamfara and Niger states have posed environmental and public health threats, with experts warning of exposure to heavy metals, toxic gases and contaminated water.

Nigeria's mining industry has witnessed renewed government attention under the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development, which has intensified efforts to formalise artisanal mining, enforce environmental compliance and attract foreign investment.

However, the latest incident suggests that gaps remain in monitoring host communities and enforcing mine closure and rehabilitation obligations.

Licensed operators fail to fully reclaim sites after operations, leaving hazardous pits that communities later exploit informally.

In recent months, the ministry has launched initiatives aimed at integrating artisanal miners into cooperatives and strengthening environmental and safety oversight.

Alake has repeatedly warned that illegal mining and unsafe practices threaten not only lives but also Nigeria's efforts to build a globally competitive mining industry.

The Plateau tragedy could accelerate reforms on abandoned mine management, community engagement and environmental remediation.