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Nigeria oil blast site sealed off

The site of an oil pipeline explosion near a school in Nigeria's commercial capital Lagos has been sealed off after the fire was extinguished.

Nigeria's oil parastatal cut the flow of fuel to the broken pipeline and a heavy downpour helped firefighters bring the blaze under control.

At least 100 people - many children - died, the Red Cross said, but officials said the death toll was lower.

The explosion tore through the Ijegan suburb after a bulldozer hit the pipe.

Efforts to find more bodies in the wreckage have been halted, says the BBC's Umar Elleman at the scene.

Rescue workers are now trying to locate missing people who fled the area.

Stampede

Many people were killed in a stampede to escape the flames, aid workers said.

After the blast, many schoolchildren discarded school bags and sandals as they tried to flee.

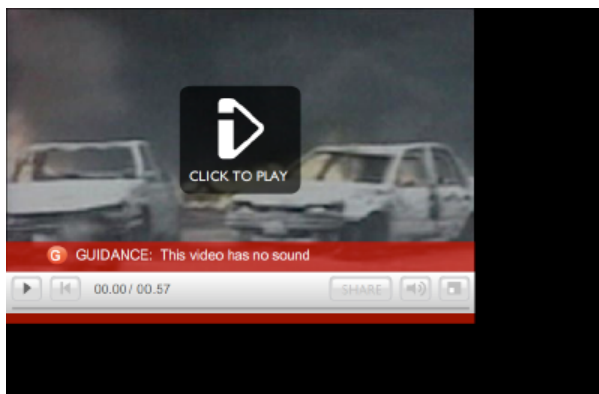
Witnesses said the ground around the explosion was so hot that shoes melted.

"Many children have died - in fact you cannot even count them," witness Aderemi Salau told Associated Press news agency.

"Some of them were choked by the smoke, others crushed by the concrete fence of the school while some were suffocated in an attempt to rush out."



Local government officials have tried to play down the number of people killed



Nigeria pipeline clips

But the Lagos state government has played down the number of

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dead.

A spokesman said 15 people were killed and 17 injured.

Two children were killed in the initial blast, they said.

Thick plumes of smoke

At least 36 people have been taken to a nearby military hospital, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) spokesman Abdulsalam Mohammed said.

A thick plume of black smoke could be seen rising from the fire from kilometres away on Thursday night, said our reporter.

Houses and cars were already burning and the flames were about to engulf two schools, he said.

Residents of the neighbourhood were clearing out their houses, desperately trying to save some possessions before the fire spread to their homes, says our correspondent.

Nigeria is one of the world's major oil producers and pipelines cut through many residential areas, both in cities such as Lagos and in oil-producing areas.

NIGERIA PIPELINE DISASTERS

December 2007: At least 40 people killed in Lagos

December 2006: At least 250 killed in Lagos

May 2006: At least 150 killed in Lagos

Dec 2004: At least 20 killed in Lagos

Sept 2004: At least 60 killed in Lagos

June 2003: At least 105 killed in Abia State

Jul 2000: At least 300 killed in Warri

Mar 2000: At least 50 killed in Abia State

Oct 1998: At least 1,000 killed in Jesse

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Several of these have exploded, often when local people cut holes in them to steal oil.

The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) says there at least 400 acts of vandalism on its pipelines each year, reports the AP news agency.

At least 40 people were killed in a pipeline explosion in December in Lagos last year.

In 2006, some 400 people were killed in two blasts in Lagos.

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