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109 killed as fire guts illegal refinery in Imo

● NEMA continues search for more bodies

From Jude Aguguo
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At least 109 people were burnt to death at Abacheke Kpofire in Egbema community of Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State when an illegal oil refinery site went up in flames.

Our correspondent gathered that many people got burnt in the incident, which happened on Friday night.

The head of operations of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in the state, Ifeanyi Nnaji, who confirmed the incident, said that so far, 109 bodies had been counted on the ground while search for more bodies continued.

He added that the figure was apart from others that fell into the river and those who were burnt inside the illegal refinery.

He said, "It was more serious than we envisaged. As at this evening, we have counted 109

bodies on the ground while countless others fell into the river and others died inside the refinery."

It was also learnt that six vehicles were burnt during the incident.

The Commissioner for Petroleum Resources in the state, Goodluck Opiah, said the operator of the illegal refinery, Okenze Onyenwoke, had been identified but he is currently at large. He, however, said the operator had been declared wanted by the police.

The Egbema Youth president,

Okenya Theadus Mario, confirmed the incident to our correspondent in Owerri yesterday. He said that on visiting the scene of the incident, he saw charred remains of the refinery operators and their customers.

Mario said some of the burnt corpses had decomposed and were given instant burial.

The police public relations officer, Imo State command, CSP Mike Abatham, also confirmed the incident and described it as unfortunate.