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Thursday, December 13, 2007

Pipeline explosion in Lagos

* NNPC Loses one employee, may fly others abroad
 By Yakubu Lawal and Yetunde Ebosele

Despite government ceaseless efforts to put any end to the nefarious acts of petroleum products pipelines in the country yet another disaster was recorded yesterday when a product line from Atlas Cove to Mosimi was erupted at Arepo area of Akute Ogun state.

The disaster according to the Petroleum Product Marketing Company (PPMC) occurred on Tuesday when the vandalised portion of the pipeline erupted and caught fire.

Besides the PPMC said it lost one of its maintenance Manager Mr. M.C Ozigili, who was among the top management staff of the PPMC that were going to assess the level of damage at the site. While the Area Manager of Mosimi Depot, Mr.Oshinyemi, the accountant Mrs. Igbiolahanla and the auditor Mr.Ante.o.Ante were seriously burnt.

Speaking with the Guardian on phone yesterday the Company's Manager in charge of public affairs, Mr. Ralph Ugwu said the managers were engulfed in the inferno while trying to control the fire.

According to a statement made available to the Guardian by the Group Public Affairs of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) Levi Ajuonoma, the affected persons are already receiving attention at the NNPC medical centre in Mosimi.

The Guardian gathered that arrangement are in top gear to fly the burnt manager out of the country for treatment considering the degree of burnt on the affected managers.

Other sources said the agency is already considering flying the officers abroad for immediate medical attention, if need be.

"We are considering sending them abroad for treatment and they are likely going to be flown out today (Thursday) but I can not tell you which country as that will depend on the recommendation of NNPC medical team" the Guardian sources said.

But Ugwu said, " Our concern is to save the lives of those who survived and that is what we are doing now. Whether they will be flown out or not we have to ensure that they survive."

The affected staff got themselves entangled in the fire as they were trying to put off the fire while another sources said it was the boat that was conveying the managers to the site of the incident that exploded very close to the fire point.

Apart from the vandalisation that occurred at the Arepo village, PPMC official told the Guardian yesterday that another pipeline vandalisation occurred at some 500meters away from Atlas Cove along the Atlas-Mosimi distribution lines.

This development, has however affected pumping of products from the Atlas Cove depot to Mosimi, in Ogun state, which translates into shortage of products to the mosimi depot, although NNPC assured of adequate reserve to cater for the situation.

Besides, Ajuonoma said the corporation has directed its engineers to effect repairs on the damaged pipeline, in addition to putting up measures that will ensure that supply and distribution of petroleum products is not disrupted.

"The Corporation has enough stock of petroleum products that will last for over one month even in the absence of fresh supplies. The corporation has adequate supplies

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to cover the upcoming festive periods of Sallah, Christmas and the New Year." The statement said.

Specifically, he said the Corporation has stock of petrol that will last for 35 days and also sufficient stock of kerosene that will last for 30 days.

But the Guardian learnt further that due to the ugly incident, pumping of fuel from Atlas cove to Mosimi has been suspended

The Corporation, according to Ajuonoma put a lot of efforts to build up the stock in order to sustain the tempo of distribution and supplies nationwide.

"The NNPC is committed to living up to its responsibility of touching the lives of Nigerians in many positive ways and will not be deterred by the nefarious activities of vandals. Vandalism remained the greatest threat to effective and efficient supply and distribution of petroleum products." He pledged.

Besides, the Guardian gathered that the management staff involved in the inferno were actually on their way to find out how the ruptured lines would be repaired.

Speaking with the Guardian, an anonymous source alleged that the staff at the mosimi depot after a meeting called on the management for funds to repair the damaged lines but that the Mosimi's area manager Mr. Oshinyemi had insisted that the key managers would have to visit the site before the 50,000 demanded for the repairs would be released.

Giving an insight into the corporation's lost in the past years to vandalism, he said the NNPC suffered about 971 cases of pipeline vandalism in 2004, 2,258 in 2005 and 2,912 cases in 2006 with a substantial number this year.

To the end, the corporation he explained is soliciting the support of all and sundry, especially the media to fight the menace of pipeline vandalism in the country.

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