

15 feared dead in Calabar tank farm explosion

By Anietie Akpan, Calabar | 17 July 2017 | 4:40 am



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A member of staff of one of the tank farms, who pleaded anonymity, said: "Almost 13 people that we have been able to confirm have died. So, many have severe injuries and have been rushed to the hospital."

Not fewer than 15 persons were feared dead and many others injured yesterday in a fire incident at a tank farm in Calabar Free Trade Zone (CFTZ), Calabar, Cross River State.

The Guardian learnt that the incident occurred when a vessel was supplying Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), also known as petrol, to two of the tank farms around 2:00 a.m.

The eyewitness said the ship was on the river supplying the product through pipes that passed through the premises of the tank farms about 700 metres away.

He said: "While supplying was going on, a member of staff of one of the tank farms, who was not on duty that night, opened the pipes inside their premises to siphon petrol but pressure from the pipe knocked him down and he died on the spot.

"The petrol now flowing in huge quantities filled the premises and flowed through gutters back into the river and into the Esuk Utan community and this was around 4:00 a.m. Due to the strong fumes of the petrol, some members of the community woke up to realise that petrol was flowing through their gutters and decided to scoop the product for themselves.

"There must have been a spark which set off a fire and killed six of them on the spot. The fire followed the petrol through the gutters back to the vessel that supplied it but the men on board managed to stop the fire from engulfing the vessel, using sophisticated fire-fighting equipment."

However, a fishing settlement on the waterfront nearby was not so lucky as "the settlement, which also serves as a fish market, was razed and seven people, who lived there, lost their lives and many wooden canoes and engine boats were caught in the inferno.

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Three vessels in the adjoining Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) were also affected by the fire, including the tank farm where the problem started but it was also checked by the sophisticated fire-fighting equipment in the premises.

Another eyewitness, a member of staff of one of the tank farms, who pleaded anonymity, said: "Almost 13 people that we have been able to confirm have died. So, many have severe injuries and have been rushed to the hospital.

Meanwhile, the state Commissioner of Police, Mr. Hafiz Inuwa, who confirmed the incident, said that nine people died. He added that several other persons, who sustained injuries, were currently being treated in one of the hospitals in Calabar.

According to him, the manager of the depot is yet to brief the police on what led to the explosion. "Up till now, nobody has come out to tell us what caused the fire outbreak.

"We have gone round, we have done what we can do but investigation will later reveal what actually led to the explosion," he said.

The Commissioner for Petroleum Resources, Mr. Itaya Nyong, who was at the scene and apparently not happy with the unfortunate incident, said: "The culprits will be brought to book. The fire was as a result of the activities of criminal elements."

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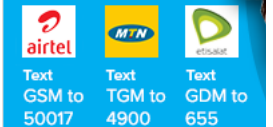
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