

Pregnant woman, three children die as fire guts seven houseboats in Rivers

From **Obinna Nwaoku,**
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A PREGNANT woman and three children were, yesterday, burnt to death as fire gutted seven houseboats at Bonny/Bille/Nembe Jetty in Port Harcourt city Council of Rivers State.

The Guardian gathered that many others sustained burns in the inferno, which happened on Monday afternoon.

According to an eyewitness, the fire was ignited by spark from a cigarette smoker who was offloading kerosene products from a boat.

The eyewitness, who gave his name as Johnson, said the boat exploded after the said person ignited his lighter and engulfed six other houseboats within range.

The Guardian learnt that the bodies of the pregnant woman and three children were recovered, while many

were feared missing.

Several others, who sustained severe burns were rushed to the hospital for medical attention.

He said: "Children and many others were feared dead in the fire outbreak at Nembe waterside close to creek road market in Port Harcourt.

"The boat was parked beside 6 other boats. one had passengers with their goods like timber, crayfish, garri, kerosene, and other food items already waiting to take off."

Another witness identified as Madam Elijah, said: "These boys who don't want to be useful to themselves have just wasted the lives of people. My greatest pain is the children.

"A baby of a month old and the mother roasted because of carelessness.

"They were unloading product from a boat while a man was smoking. I don't know what he did. The next thing

we saw was a fire igniting from the offloading boat.

"Since the place already has oil and other products, the fire became uncontrollable.

"The heavy breeze helped to spread the fire to umbrellas and tables of people who were buying and selling.

"Some persons who were injured were rushed to Rivers State teaching hospital for treatment.

"Fire service personnel who came were driven away in anger by traders for coming late when the damage has already been done."

Meanwhile, the spokesman of the Rivers State Police Command, Nnamdi Omoni has confirmed the incident, stating that efforts are on to stop incessant petroleum inferno in the state.

He urged residents to desist from storage of petroleum products in residential areas as well as report any incident to the police for quick action.