

43 Die As Fire Ravages Okrika, Port Harcourt Jetties

By Ofonime Umanah
BUREAU CHIEF, Port Harcourt

No fewer than 43 people were feared killed in Okrika and in the Abonnema Wharf jetties in Rivers State, following fire outbreak that also rendered hundreds of people homeless.

The early morning fire explosion on Wednesday, traced to the activities of oil 'bunkerers', claimed about 30 persons. Their

houses were also not spared by the inferno which affected the Ogoloma district of Okrika.

About the same time, reports said three people died at the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) jetty in Okrika. Two of the victims, it was learnt, were staff of the corporation.

A similar fire incident occurred at the Abuloma waterfront on Tuesday night. Up to

10 people were feared dead while some 1,000 residents were rendered homeless.

Eye witnesses said the inferno might have been ignited by the large deposit of fuel in the area, which is being stored by dealers of the popular 'Asari fuel' who reside in the waterfront.

It was learnt that illegal 'bunkerers', numbering about 50, were scooping unrefined pe-

troleum products in the Ogoloma jetty when the explosion occurred. About 20 of them escaped.

Scores of people were at the jetty wailing and trying to identify the remains of their relatives. But security operatives did not allow journalists near the area.

The state Police Commissioner, Felix Ogbaudu, who spoke on the incident on Wednesday, said it was saddening that lives were lost to the inferno and described the suspected act that led to the outbreak as criminal.

DRR Shute Six