

Baby, Mother, Three Others Die In Onitsha Petrol Tanker Fire

RAYMOND OZOJI;
ECHE NWAOBASI
AWKA / NNEWI

Tragedy struck in Onitsha on Wednesday when a 33,000-litre petrol tanker lost control

● Houses, Shops Razed

and rammed into a ditch at Upper Iweka, on the Onitsha/Awka Road in Onitsha, igniting an inferno that reportedly consumed a three-month old baby and his

mother.

Sources close to the affected area claimed that three other persons lost their lives in the incident.

The Anambra Police Command said the heavy duty vehicle lost control due to break failure, which caused truck to pull out while the tank containing fuel fell into the gutter, spilling its content and igniting fire.

Not fewer than six buildings

and shops were confirmed burnt in the conflagration.

Daily Independent gathered from reliable sources that the woman and her child died at the live hen market (ogbo okuko)

CONTINUES ON P10 ➔

Domestic,
External
Debts
Market Will
Aid Nigeria's
Economic **P21**
Growth - IMF

U.S. Court
Tackles
Sovereign
Immunity
In \$9.6bn
P&ID Award
Against
Nigeria **P41**

FG Deports
Saudis

Minimum Wage: Labour, FG's Parley In Crucial Stage **P41**



Scene of fire incident caused by a fuel tanker at Upper Iweka, Onitsha, Anambra State on Wednesday.

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CONTINUED FROM P1

axis of the Ochanja market area in Onitsha.

They said the woman, in a bid to retrieve some of her wares, stepped on a wooden object in front of her shop when the fire was raging and slipped into the gutter with her child where they were engulfed by the fire.

It was also gathered that another yet to be identified man died in a phone plaza in the same Ochanja market while trying to retrieve his property.

According to eyewitnesses, the inferno forced many markets in and around Upper Iweka, Ochanja area and even some parts of the famous Onitsha Main Market to shut down for fear of being affected.

The Sector Commander, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), Anambra Command, Andrew Kumapayi, stated that the incident occurred about 12:44p.m.

Kumapayi said that the fire service officials got to the scene of the fire promptly but could not put out the fire as their water pump developed fault.

"The tanker lost control due to break failure, the head of the heavy duty vehicle pulled out while the tank containing fuel fell into the gutter spilling its content and igniting fire.

"The fire spread through the gutter and affected

about six houses on the road and shops in Ochanja market.

"The fire service got there on time but their pump developed fault, they left the scene to fix the pump and re-strategise.

"If the pump had functioned, the fire wouldn't have spread to the houses and shops," he said.

Kumapayi warned tanker owners and drivers to ensure that their vehicles were in good condition before plying the roads.

"The saving grace was the road bumps constructed by the state government; it prevented the tanker from ramming into buildings around the area," he said.

Kumapayi said policemen and FRSC officials were on ground to maintain order and ensure free flow of traffic.

The incident caused heavy traffic gridlock along the federal highway as a result of the ensuing stampede at the Ochanja area of Onitsha.

The raging inferno generated further panic because of the presence of petrol stations in the area.

But the Anambra Police Command confirmed only the death of the woman and her child.

SP Haruna Mohammed, Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), confirmed the death in a statement issued to journalists in Awka.