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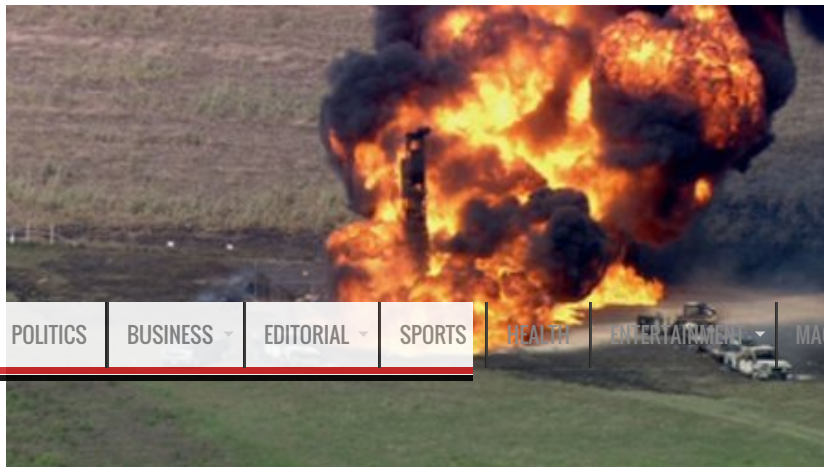
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Agip pipeline explodes in Bayelsa, kills 12

Posted by: Mike Odiegwu in News ⌚ 2 days ago

The Tebidaba-Azuzuama pipeline belonging to the Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) in Azuzuama, Southern Ijaw Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, exploded yesterday, killing 12 people.

The fire resulting from the blast was said to have injured four others while one person was declared missing.

The explosion, described by eyewitnesses as deafening, was said to have quaked the nearby Azuzuama community and created panic among the residents.

It was gathered that most of the dead and injured victims were workers of Agip who were in the oil field to effect repairs on the pipeline.

A source said the pipeline was earlier ruptured and caused oil to spill in the environment, but Agip decided to clamp the damaged point and carry out general repairs on the pipeline.

A source who pleaded anonymity said: "The victims are Agip workers. The pipeline was breached and Agip deployed workers to weld the tampered point.

"There was no safety precaution and a spark during the welding must have caused the explosion. The explosion was deafening and the fire spread to far distance."

The source said the incident occurred at about 5:30pm on Thursday, adding that there was no report that a security operative was a victim of the explosion.

But another source said the blast happened during a Joint Investigation Visit (JIV) to determine the cause of the spill from the damaged pipeline.

The source, who spoke in confidence, said the victims were burnt beyond recognition.

He, however, added that the JIV team comprised delegates from the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), NAOC and representatives of Azuzuama community.

A former Vice-Chairman of the Azuzuama Community Development Committee (CDC), Mr. Dennis Dumde, said 12 bodies were recovered from the site of the explosion.

"The identities of the victims could not be ascertained. They were burnt beyond recognition," he said.

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A resident, who identified himself simply as Steve, **claimed** that the explosion occurred when a bulldozer hired to clear the spill site hit the pipeline.

He said: "We heard a loud bang and we saw a thick smoke coming from the location of the ruptured pipeline. Many of the villagers rushed to the site but the fire had taken over the bush and they could not rescue anybody.

"At about 8pm, a rescue team was raised by the villagers to search the scene. Four bodies were recovered on Thursday night. Another search was conducted on Friday morning and six more bodies were recovered. We cannot identify them. It is sad."

The Commissioner for Environment, Mr. Iniruo Wills, could not be reached for comments, but a source from the ministry said the governor of the state, Mr. Seriake Dickson, had been intimated of the development.

The Police Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Butswat Asinim, confirmed the incident but said it occurred at about 4 pm.

It was gathered that the charred remains of the victims had been deposited in an undisclosed morgue.

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