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'11 dead, 10 injured in Calabar tank farm fire'

Reported By: [Nicholas Kalu](#) On: July 17, 2017 In: [News](#), [News Update](#)

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At least 13 persons were feared killed in a tank farm fire at the Calabar Free Zone Enterprise (FZE) in Cross River State yesterday.

Several others sustained severe injuries and were taken to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital (UCTH).

The Calabar FZE in Esuk Utan Community is host to several tank farms.







The fire was due to illegal activities in one of the tank farms, The Nation gathered.

It was learnt that a vessel was supplying Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), popularly known as petrol, to two of the tank farms around 2am.

The ship, which was on the river nearby was supplying the product through pipes that passed through the premises of both tank farms. The distance between the ship and the tank farm is about a kilometre.

While supplying was going on, a staff of one of the farms, identified as Sunny, who it was gathered was not on duty that night, opened the pipes inside their premises to siphon petrol.

It was believed he was working with others and had been successful for a while until the pressure from where he was siphoning from knocked him down. It could not be ascertained what caused this. He died on the spot.

 e petrol filled the premises and flowed through gutters back into the river and into the
 uk Utan community, the host community. Due to the strong fumes, some members of
 e community woke up to realise that petrol was flowing through their gutters and
 cided to scoop the product for themselves. A fire was ignited and killed six of them.
 e Nation learnt that the fire followed the petrol through the gutters back to the vessel.
 e 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. The settlement, which also serves as a fish market, was razed and seven people, who lived there, died, according to eyewitnesses. Several wooden canoes and engine boats were caught in the inferno.

Three vessels in the adjoining Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA) were also affected by the fire.

A employee of one of the tank farms, who pleaded for anonymity, said: “Almost 30 people that we have been able to confirm have died. So many have severe injuries and have been rushed to the hospital. I saw someone whose entire legs had melted in the fire. It was only his bones that were sticking out. I do not know if he would survive. It was very horrible. There was fire everywhere. Nobody knew where they would run to. Many other companies in this vicinity and even inside the NPA have had one equipment

or the other affected by the fire. The truth is that they were doing an illegal business there; that is why there was no safety measure. In fact, there was no safety measure at all that is why the situation got out of hand. If it was a normal operation, I believe it could have been contained easily. It is something they have been doing all the time, but today was bad luck for them.

"Despite what has happened, I can say it is just fortunate that the tank farms themselves

 d not blow up, thanks to the sophisticated fire-fighting equipment they have here,
 cause the impact would have been like that of an atomic bomb. If that had happened,
 ere is no community around us that would not have been severely affected."
 mmissioner of Police Hafiz Inuwa confirmed the deaths. He said his men were on
 ound when the fire was raging and helped put out the fire as well as cordoned the area
 hoodlums would not take advantage of the situation to loot.

Commissioner for Petroleum Resources Mr Itaya Nyong, who was at the scene of the incident, confirmed the fire was as a result of the activities of criminal elements who were siphoning petrol from the tank farm.

He said they were colluding with some security officials to carry out the nefarious act. He added that an investigation would be launched into the matter and culprits brought to book.

Inuwa was quoted by the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) as saying: "Up until now, nobody has come out to tell us that this is 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.

"For now, nine people are confirmed dead and many others who sustained different burns are currently receiving treatment in one of the hospitals around town."
