

# 10 passengers die, eight boats burnt in Rivers

- Four skulls recovered from wreckage

By Rosemary Nwisi, Port Harcourt    On Nov 23, 2021



Over 10 passengers died while eight boats were burnt yesterday in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital.

The incident took place at Bonny-Bille-Nembe Jetty in the Old Port Harcourt area of the city, *The Nation* learnt.

Similar fires barely 48 hours earlier destroyed properties worth billions of naira in parts of the city.

Three siblings were said to be among the dead in the latest incident.

The cause of the fire was not known at press time, but some residents suspected careless stocking and handling of illegally procured petroleum products.

Commissioner for Special Duties, Emeka Onowu, said the state government would seize any property used for illegal bunkering activities, and prosecute owners of such properties.

He was speaking during as inspection of the fire scene.

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He also accused community leaders and security agencies of sabotage by not reporting illegal bunkering activities, and arresting the perpetrators.

The fire yesterday started before 10am.

The eight boats were laden with fish, garri, yams, kegs of palm oil, as well as substances suspected to be illegally refined kerosene and diesel, among others, all of which completely razed.

The mother of the three children was said to have left them on one of the boats to get something from a nearby market, only to see a gory sight upon her return.

First responders reportedly rescued two persons who died on the way to hospital.

Heaps of planks stacked at the jetty also go burnt.

When The Nation got to the scene, there were no firefighters there.

Local youths used a mixture of sand and detergent in an attempt to contain the fire.

Firefighters who later came to the scene were chased out by the youths.

“The state firemen came here, but we did not allow them to come close because we called them when the fire started but it took them two hours to get here. By then, everything had burnt down, so what else were they coming to do?” one of the youths queried.

Police spokesman Nnamdi Omoni said four human skulls were recovered from the wreckage, but he added, “there might be more bodies in there”.