

18 killed, 13 rescued as petrol tanker explodes in Enugu



- ***Governor Mbah visits accident scene, expresses sadness***

Tragedy struck in Enugu yesterday as a petrol tanker exploded at the Ugwu Onyeama section of the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway, killing no fewer than 18 people, including three children.

Thirteen others were rescued, according to a statement signed by the spokesperson for the Federal Road Safety Corps, Olusegun Ogungbemide.

Ogungbemide attributed the accident to brake failure, adding that it involved 17 vehicles, including a petrol tanker, a water tanker, 15 cars, and a tricycle.

Eleven vehicles were burnt in the inferno while emergency responders managed to rescue 10 victims with varying degrees of injuries.

Three escaped unscathed while the remaining 18 victims were burnt beyond recognition.

The explosion, which occurred around 11:30am, caused widespread panic, affecting another petrol tanker and razing six other vehicles.

Rescue efforts were said to have been hindered by the intensity of the fire, which made it difficult for bystanders to access the scene.

It was gathered that some of the victims were trying to run away from the scene when they were caught by the fire.

Enugu State Governor, Dr Peter Mbah, who visited the scene of the accident yesterday, expressed sadness, saying that government had already swung into action to ensure that the victims received full medical attention.

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He also said that steps were being taken to forestall future occurrences, including enforcement of road rules and fixing the part of the federal road that was in disrepair.

Describing the accident as unfortunate, Mbah commiserated with the families of the victims.

He further directed the Enugu sector commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission, Mr Franklin Agbakoba, and the state's Commissioner for Transport, Mr Obi Ozor, to ensure that all tankers conveying inflammable substances in the state have anti-spill lock that will prevent spillage in case of accident.

"This is an accident involving a tanker that preliminary investigation show may have had a break failure, fell down, had its product, premium motor spirit, spilled from the tank and ignited. So, this is for us a tragedy where we have some casualties.

"But as I said, investigation is still at preliminary stages. The police and other law enforcement agencies are on it. We want to get to the roots of this for us to understand the true cause of the accident.

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"In the meantime, we have moved those that are in need of treatment to the hospitals for full medical attention.

"My Commissioner for Health and also my Special Adviser on Health, the Chief Medical Director of the Enugu State University of Science and Technology Teaching Hospital (ESUTTH), Parklane, Enugu, the police, and Federal Road Safety Corps are all involved.

"They have my instruction to ensure that maximum medical attention is given to the survivors," the governor said.

He added: "We are also taking quick measures as a government. I have just been speaking the head of the Federal Road Safety Corps to make sure they enforce the rules that prohibit tanker drivers without an anti-spill lock from the road.

"Tankers conveying premium motor spirit and inflammable products must have anti-spill lock to ensure that when these trucks fall down, they do not spill (their contents). It is very important.

"Also, for us as a government, we are going to be looking at how we can deploy some traffic rules to ensure that we do not have a recurrence of this.

"We are obviously not going to wait for the federal government to fix the other section of the road.

"We as government are going to take steps to ensure that whatever needs to be done on that section of the federal road is done immediately so we would never want a reoccurrence of this."

While briefing the governor on some of the preliminary investigations conducted by the FRSC, the Sector Commander for Enugu explained that the accident and spillage was as a result of a brake failure.

He said that injured road users were rushed to the hospital for treatment and thanked the governor for showing leadership by rushing to the scene and also undertaking to foot the medical bills.

Yesterday's tanker explosion made it the third time that a similar accident would occur in the new year.

It came after the one that occurred at Dikko Junction in Gurara Local Government Area, Niger State penultimate Saturday, claiming no fewer than 98 lives and leaving 69 others injured.

A similar accident had also occurred in Agbor, Delta State on January 6, leaving five people dead while some bank buildings were burnt.