

SPECIAL REPORT

Overloading, drivers' mental alertness, attitude responsible for most tanker crashes, explosions — Stakeholders

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the explosions. For many, life will never return to normal.

While the list below may not be exhaustive, here is the timeline of gas and fuel-related explosions in Nigeria that were reported in the media in seven months covering August 8, 2024 and March 7, 2025.

AUGUST 8, 2024: Lagos Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas truck explosion at an ExxonMobil filling station on Awolowo Road, Ikeja, Lagos, at around 11 a.m.
- **Impact:** At least 7 injured persons with 2 in critically injured individuals and six vehicles were destroyed. Parts of a nearby building were also damaged. Emergency responders confirmed that no fatalities occurred, but the two male victims who sustained severe burns and were taken to the Lagos State Teaching Hospital (LASUTH).

• **Deaths:** 0

• **Injuries:** 7 (2 critically injured)

AUGUST 25, 2024: Patoranking's Family Tragedy in Abakaliki

- **Incident:** A gas explosion occurred at the residence of George and Chioma Onuabuchi in the Waterworks area of Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, after a housewarming and birthday celebration.

• **Impact:** Patoranking's younger sister, Chioma, died shortly after the explosion, while her husband, George, survived but passed away in September. Their three-year-old son was left orphaned. The incident deeply affected the musician and his family.

• **Deaths:** 2 (Chioma and George Onuabuchi)

• **Injuries:** 0

SEPTEMBER 9, 2024: Niger State Fuel Tanker Collision

- **Incident:** A collision between a fuel tanker and a lorry carrying passengers and cattle in Niger State, which resulted in an explosion.

• **Impact:** At least 59 people died, and many others were injured. The incident occurred around 00:30 am, and emergency responders were able to recover bodies, with a potentially rising death toll.

• **Deaths:** 59

• **Injuries:** Unknown, but several injured, including emergency responders.

SEPTEMBER 15, 2024: Akwa Ibom Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas explosion in Urua Essien Etuk village, Ikot Abasi, Akwa Ibom State, caused significant environmental damage and the destruction of homes.

• **Impact:** No deaths were reported, but the explosion released toxic gases and caused structural damage that rendered many homeless. The village head revealed that the explosion's toxic fallout had led to his leg cancer diagnosis.

• **Deaths:** 0

• **Injuries:** 0 (though concerns over cancer due to toxic gas exposure)

OCTOBER 15, 2024: Jigawa Fuel Tanker Explosion

- **Incident:** A fuel tanker crashed in Majiya, Jigawa State, triggering a massive explosion as locals attempted to scoop fuel.

• **Impact:** At least 209 people were killed, and around 124 others were injured. A mass burial was conducted for the victims, and many local residents expressed grief over the tragedy, calling it the worst tragedy in the community's history.

• **Deaths:** 209

• **Injuries:** 124

OCTOBER 17, 2024: Ebonyi School Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas explosion at the Good Shepherd Catering School in Orokeonuoha, Ebonyi Local Government Area, occurred when a student answered a phone call while cooking, causing a cylinder to explode.

• **Impact:** At least 10 schoolgirls aged 12 to 19 sustained burns. Five of them were placed on life support at the Alex Ekwueme Federal University Teaching Hospital. The incident left parents, especially Mr. Emmanuel Nwizi, devastated.

• **Deaths:** 2

• **Injuries:** 8 (5 were put on life support)

NOVEMBER 15, 2024: Katsina Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A suspected gas explosion occurred in Magama Jibia, Katsina State, at an abandoned filling station linked to smuggling activities.

• **Impact:** Several injuries were reported, and there was extensive damage to vehicles and houses. Details of casualties were not immediately confirmed.

• **Deaths:** Unknown

• **Injuries:** Several (exact number unspecified)

DECEMBER 15, 2024: Enugu Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas explosion at the family home of an X user, @UptownOfLagos, in Enugu State, left three brothers



Olusegun Ogungbemi

critically injured and in the intensive care unit (ICU).

- **Impact:** The family faced a tragic and painful ordeal, with one of the brothers discharged in early January while the other two continued their slow recovery.

• **Deaths:** 0

• **Injuries:** 3 brothers critically injured

DECEMBER 25, 2024: Minna Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas explosion occurred at a vulcanizer's shop in Kpakungun, Minna, during the Christmas celebrations.
- **Impact:** One person died instantly, and two others were injured. The explosion resulted from a gas cylinder being overheated and triggered by water poured on it.

• **Deaths:** 1 (Zakari Aliyu)

• **Injuries:** 3 (Mohammed Usman Baba, Umar Mohammed and one other)

JANUARY 4, 2025: Rivers Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas explosion occurred in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, following a faulty cylinder being repaired at a gas refilling shop.

• **Impact:** At least 20 people were injured, including a pregnant woman and her children. Many others were rushed to the hospital for treatment. The explosion led to damage to nearby buildings.

• **Deaths:** 5

• **Injuries:** 16 (including a pregnant woman)

JANUARY 5, 2025: Delta Fuel Tanker Explosion

- **Incident:** A fuel tanker overturned and exploded in Agbor Ika South Local Government Area, Delta State, killing five residents.

• **Impact:** Several residents were killed in the explosion, and surrounding properties were destroyed by the fire.

• **Deaths:** 5

• **Injuries:** Unknown

JANUARY 18, 2025: Suleja Fuel Tanker Explosion

- **Incident:** A fuel tanker overturned and exploded after spilling fuel in Suleja, Niger State, during an attempt by locals to collect the fuel.

• **Impact:** At least 100 people were killed, and 25 others were injured, including rescuers. The explosion is part of a troubling trend of tanker accidents in Nigeria, often linked to poorly maintained vehicles and roads.

• **Deaths:** 100

• **Injuries:** 88

JANUARY 26, 2025: Enugu Petrol Tanker Explosion

- **Incident:** A petrol tanker explosion occurred at the Ugwu-Onyeama axis on the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway, killing a total of 23 commuters.

• **Impact:** The explosion that initially killed 18 also involved the destruction of eight vehicles and left 23 others injured, five of whom later succumbed to their injuries. Many of the victims were severely burned.

• **Deaths:** 23

• **Injuries:** 21

FEBRUARY 4, 2025: Adamawa Petrol Tankers Explosion

- **Incident:** Two petrol tankers exploded at a filling station near Yola International Airport, Adamawa State, when emergency responders ran out of water during efforts to contain the fire.

• **Impact:** The fire consumed both tankers and blocked

the road, causing significant traffic disruptions as curious onlookers ignored safety warnings.

• **Deaths:** 0

• **Injuries:** 0

FEBRUARY 9, 2025: Niger Gas Explosion

- **Incident:** A gas explosion destroyed a rice mill, fuel tanker, and several properties at F&S Investment Gas Station, Sabon Wuse, Niger State.

• **Impact:** No casualties were reported, but the explosion marked the fourth such incident in Niger State in recent past. The fire spread rapidly, engulfing the entire gas station and nearby properties.

• **Deaths:** 0

• **Injuries:** 0

MARCH 4, 2025: Ibadan Petrol Tanker Explosion

- **Incident:** A petrol tanker exploded beside the Total filling station in Orita-Challenge, Ibadan, due to brake failure when the driver tried to negotiate a roundabout.

• **Impact:** Two people died instantly in the explosion, while several others sustained injuries.

• **Deaths:** 2

• **Injuries:** 0

MARCH 5, 2025: Ogun Bus Explosion

- **Incident:** A bus carrying 18 passengers caught fire after a gas cylinder exploded, causing it to somersault along the Abeokuta-Sagamu Expressway.

• **Impact:** At least 15 people were killed in the explosion. The driver of the bus was arrested, and investigations into the cause of the explosion were ongoing.

• **Deaths:** 15

• **Injuries:** Unknown

Overall summary

TOTAL DEATHS: 423 (approximate, as the death toll rose even days after impact)

TOTAL INJURIES: 317 (approximate, excluding unknown or unspecified number of injured persons)

Government intervention

Despite the growing body count and the visible destruction, some believe the response from the Nigerian government has been largely inadequate. While there have been promises to investigate the causes of these explosions and some steps taken to improve safety standards, there has been no real, systemic change to prevent future occurrences.

After one of the explosions last October, President Tinubu reaffirmed his government's commitment to reviewing and enhancing fuel transportation safety protocols and assured that the police would strengthen measures to prevent further accidents.

Also in January, the president directed the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and other agencies in charge of enforcing traffic rules to implement measures to prevent recurring petrol tanker explosions across the country.

"The president calls for caution and adherence to safety measures among road users, particularly fuel tanker operators," a statement by presidential spokesperson, Bayo Onanuga, read. "Furthermore, he directs agencies in charge of enforcing traffic rules to implement measures to prevent recurring petrol tanker explosions nationwide."

In another breadth, the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA) proposed a ban on trucks with 60,000-litre capacity to prevent incessant petrol tanker explosion incidents. Chief Executive Officer of the NMDPRA, Farouk Ahmed, announced this at a stakeholders meeting in Abuja last month.

The announcement may not be unconnected to the solutions suggested by the stakeholders' initiative that was launched late last year by the Major Energy Marketers Association of Nigeria (MEMAN) and sought to identify and address the factors responsible for these incessant petroleum tanker crashes and explosions.

The agencies that were involved in this initiative were the Depot and Petroleum Products Marketers Association of Nigeria (DAPPMAN), the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA), the Nigerian Association of Road Transport Owners (NARTO) and other key players.

Their findings indicated that the causes of petrol tanker accidents included drivers' mental alertness and attitude and the overloading of trucks, some up to 66,000 litres, far exceeding safe limits.

According to the NMDPRA boss in February 2024, petrol tanker explosions alone have led to the death of 493 people — 7 in 2022, 24 in 2023, 341 in 2024 and 121 in 2024 (up to early

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Ban on 60,000-litre petrol tankers took effect from March 1 —FRSC

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February).

"This year to date, we have already recorded five road tanker accidents leading to 121 fatalities and 79 injuries. These incidents are unnecessary and unacceptable. They must be prevented and brought down to zero.

"Determination of an appropriate truck carrying capacity of 60,000 litres versus 45,000 litres, given the negative impact on the roads," Ahmed said.

He also disclosed that the recurrence of tanker explosions is indicative of the lack of adherence to safety protocols by tanker drivers and other stakeholders. Some of the precautions include the Minimum Industry Safety Training for Downstream Operators (MISTDO), which includes training and retraining of drivers, motor boys, and all personnel involved in downstream operations, mandatory installation of anti-spill safety valves on all petroleum product tanker trucks and the implementation of safe-to-load initiatives.

He added: "Colour coding and branding of all tank trucks. Spot checks by FRSC on fatigued drivers and those under the influence. Broadcast post-crash emergency numbers and first responders to cordon off accident sites. Enlightenment and sensitisation of the public about the dangers of scooping the volatile hydrocarbons at accident sites. Regular meetings with stakeholders. Regulating route management by designating routes and commuting times."

But at the same meeting, NARTO president, Yusuf Othman, said the move would lead to a potential loss of over N300 billion in investment.

He was reported to have said: "I want to remind everybody here that transporters are investors, and these investments are huge. Any truck that loads 60,000 litres must be a truck with a strong and sound engine at an average cost of N150m.

"By our estimation, we have 2,000 of them. We are talking about N300 billion investments, some of which were financed by banks and other lenders."

While noting that the fuel distribution in the country is carried out 100 per cent by trucks,

Othman also urged the government to put the necessary measures in place to avert accidents on the road, adding that there was a strong correlation between the condition of the roads and accidents.

How to prevent loss of lives, properties

Speaking extensively to *Sunday Tribune* on the safety measures put in place by the FRSC to curb the petrol/gas tanker auto crashes, FRSC national spokesman and Corps Public Education Officer, ACM Olusegun Ogungbemi, harped on the need for regulatory agencies to uphold quality assurance at all levels in

the process of transportation the products, including monitoring the safety of tankers, quality of the materials being used to manufacture the tankers, loading of petrol products, status of the managers of the drivers and the proper management of the roads.

"So, all these put together made the federal government to form various committees that have been given the mandate to look at the root cause of all these crises we are having all over and there have been decisions taken by the stakeholders, with the latest being the banning of tankers that carry more than 60,000 litres of fuel at a time. That's the mandate we have been given, and we started the implementation on March 1.

"Also, we have more than 116 active depots in Lagos State, where we have our operatives monitoring vehicles that are safe enough to load. We call it the safe-to-load concept, where if your vehicle is not fit to load, you're not allowed to be loaded.

Before this time, we have been advocating to road users and stakeholders on the need for safety. "To FRSC, loaded tankers are the most dangerous in the entire world and need to be attended to with every sensitivity required. When you look at the number of vehicles that are loaded daily, you will be talking about 20,000 vehicles moving all over Nigeria's road space. When they are involved in crashes, it is always very loud because fire is involved, with the devastating effects of fatalities and injuries.

"When you compare the number involved in crashes to the number moving all over the federation at the same time, to a large extent, with the policy put in place and our efforts, the Federal Road Safety Corps has done so well.

"We have experienced what the major marketers have done, and we have always been giving advocacy to all other independent marketers on the need to emulate them so that if they could be boasting that in the last six years, despite the number of trucks they have, they have not been involved in road traffic crashes. We pass it as a message to other road users that are doing the same business.

"While we wait for the return to the natural domicile of the movement of these contents, we continue to keep the roads safe for other users. There are some protocols involved in the conveyance of these items in line with what we acceded to such that when you are moving sensitive items, there are things expected to be done.

"First, signals indicating to other road users the kind of items you are carrying. Secondly, we know that all over the world, crashes could occur involving loaded tankers, but because they have their safety valves, even when the tankers fall, they don't spill. The infernos that are always recorded are a result of spillage. When a tanker falls, it doesn't spill because the safety valves are always intact. It is just a matter of raising the vehicles up again and moving on," Ogungbemi explained.

When queried on why it appears tanker drivers oftentimes fail to comply with the use of safety valves, he said it is difficult to enforce the use of safety valves when trucks are already in transit, adding that that was why they check for compliance at the depots.

He also disclosed that only a fraction of the total petrol tankers on Nigerian roads load products from the depot and get safety certification from FRSC and other stakeholders.

"We have more than 10,000 vehicles moving all over the federation and you will agree with me that they are not all from the depot. Vehicles already certified to load from the depot have the tendency to transload to the ones that have not been certified, and what happens outside the depot may not be known to the FRSC. And you know that it is difficult to stop a loaded tanker in motion such that in the course of trying to prevent a thing, we don't cause a more devastating one. And you also know what we experience in the hands of these drivers. That takes us back to the issue of strong policies. One such policy is the introduction of speed limit devices to be installed in the tankers," he said.

On what the agency is doing to ensure compliance, Ogungbemi said: "We ensure it at the depots, but when you are in transit with loaded items, it is always more delicate. That is why we said rather than allowing them to hit the road before enforcement, we will do it at the point of loading, which, to a large extent, has assisted FRSC. We cannot always say it is total; there will always be a window of compromise. This is the reason we engage with the stakeholders, that is, the various unions managing the people — both the owners and the drivers.

"In the area of driving under the influence, not having time and space to rest. There are things you cannot enforce. The only thing is to continue to speak with them. Thank God the federal government is on the same page with us now. It would be a lie to say that it will be eradicated. What we can do is to bring it to the barest minimum."

The seeming ineffectiveness of government intervention has sparked widespread frustration, with citizens accusing the authorities of neglect and indifference. Even as families continue to mourn, there is a growing demand for meaningful reforms regarding petrol and gas as well as the sector, some of which were pointed out by NMDPRA and FRSC.

As the country continues to grapple with these explosions, the need for an overhaul of the oil and gas sector has become clearer than ever. While the industry remains central to Nigeria's economic survival, it is evident that the government and private sector must do more to modernise infrastructure, enforce safety standards, and invest in public safety, possibly through stricter oversight, improved emergency response systems, and better risk management practices across the board.