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How chlorine gas almost choked us to death — Jos victims

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DISASTER

NO fewer than eight people died and 101 others are in unconscious state after inhaling chlorine from a cylinder that exploded at the treatment plant of the Plateau State Water Board in Jos.

Though the Director of Press Affairs to Plateau State Governor, Mr. Emmanuel Nanle, confirmed the casualty figures in a statement on Saturday, eyewitness said more than 160 people were affected by the incident.

Our correspondent gathered that the cylinder containing the gaseous substance exploded at about 11.30 pm on Friday while people were asleep

and enveloped the entire neighbourhood.

The incident, *SUNDAY PUNCH* learnt, was caused by excessive inhalation of the substance.

Among the victims were a pregnant woman, a doctoral student, and another second year student of Political Science of the University of Jos. They were all said to be living in the area, just behind the treatment plant.

Those mostly affected were staff of the Nigeria Immigration Service, whose quarters are near the water board plant. Others were mostly medical students of the University of Jos and the

National Film Institute.

Both the dead and the wounded are at the Plateau State Specialist Hospital; Our Lady of Apostles Hospital; Bingham University Teaching Hospital and the Air Force Military Hospital, Jos.

Another survivor, a 500 level Medical Laboratory student of UNIJOS, Christiana Paul, who spoke from her hospital bed at the Plateau State Specialist Hospital, said when she perceived the odour, she thought it was a bleaching agent.

She said, "I knocked the doors of my friends and we all ran out towards the water board. But we discovered that the stench was coming from there, because the further

we ran, it became stronger, then, we ran back. The next thing I did was to soak one of my shirts inside water and used it to cover my nose, but the odour still permeated the soaked cloth and I was almost choking. As I kept on running, I lost much energy and passed out. Someone just came, picked me and brought me to the hospital. One of my friends could not make it as she passed out and died."

A survivor, Mrs. Eke, said to be living at the Nigeria Immigration quarters was too weak to speak as she was still on oxygen to stabilise her condition.

Other victims, a 58-year-old guard, Enoch Magaji, his wife Mary, 44, and two

children, Jacinta, 18 and Goodluck, are still battling for survival at the Accident and Emergency Ward of the Plateau State Specialist Hospital.

Public Relations Manager of Plateau State Water Board, Mr. Nangor Ndam, told our correspondent that the cylinder had been leaking, but nobody noticed it before the burst.

Governor of Plateau State, Simon Lalong, in a statement signed by Nanle, described the incident as unfortunate.

The statement said, "The Plateau State Governor, Simon Lalong, has described as unfortunate, the explosion from the chlorine cylinder of the Plateau State Water Board Treatment plant, which is located at Dogon Karfe, Jos-South Local Government Area.

"Governor Lalong, while sympathising with the families of the eight victims, who lost their lives, also wishes the over 101 affected persons of the chlorine inhalation living within the treatment plant, currently receiving treatment at OLA Hospital, Evangel Hospital (Jankwano), Plateau Specialist Hospital and Air force Military Hospital, a quick recovery."

The statement assured the public that the government has already contained the situation, adding that the contamination has not affected the water which has been supplied to the public through the main water pipes.

Our correspondent gathered that the recent event marked the third time that expired dangerous gas would escape from cylinders stored at the warehouse of the board.

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Photo: Heirs