

25 killed in Rivers illegal refinery explosion

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By Dennis Naku

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No fewer than 25 persons have lost their lives following an explosion from an illegal oil tapping point in Omoku, Ogba/Egebema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the incident occurred on Sunday morning, after the youths allegedly broke a pipeline belonging to one of the multinational oil firms operating in the areas, and began using jerrycans and buckets to scoop fuel when the tragedy struck.

A source who pleaded anonymity told our correspondent that while 25 persons were feared dead, many suffered varying degrees of burns and were receiving treatment in different hospitals in the area.

She said, “It is a very terrible incident. Imagine the death of 25 people in such a time. We learnt some youths bust a company pipeline.

“If you go to the General Hospital and other private clinics in Omoku, you will see many of the injured people scattered all over the place in both government and private hospitals taking treatment.”

Another source who spoke to our correspondent on the condition of anonymity said the inferno occurred as a result of attempts by suspected oil thieves to light mosquito coils.

He disclosed, “The leakage was from an obsolete pipeline belonging to one of the oil companies operating in the area.

Speaking, the chairman of Niger Delta Youth Movement, ONELGA chapter, Emeka Ukwuosah, advised youths in the area to engage in meaningful activities and shun illegal oil bunkering.

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Ukwuosah said, “Let me join in condemning the illegal oil bunkering going on within ONELGA. We are also calling on the security agencies to be up and doing and check what is happening within that circle.

“Secondly, we are also calling on the multinationals that own the oil facilities to overhaul their aging facilities to forestall such incidents.”

On his part, the Assistant Secretary of a vigilante group in the area, Onelga Security Peace Advisory Council, Emeka Agbabere, blamed the incident on illegal oil bunkering.

Agbabere said the vigilante group, the Community Development Committee and the youths were directed by a monarch in the area to put a stop to illegal oil bunkering activities there.

He however expressed dismay that despite their repeated campaigns for the youths to stop illegal bunkering, they paid a deaf ear.

He stated, “We proclaimed that they must put a stop to it and this is the aftermath of it. When they busted the pipeline, fire engulfed immediately and 19 of them died instantly and about 12 in two different hospitals.”

When contacted, spokesperson of the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, said she would find out and get back to our reporter.

Iringe-Koko, a Superintendent of Police, had yet to do so as of the time of filing this report on Tuesday.