

# Tragic weekend in Niger as 70 burnt scooping petrol from crashed tanker

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**I**t was a tragic weekend in Niger State after no fewer than 70 persons, including a pregnant woman and many children, were burnt to death while scooping fuel from a crashed fuel tanker.

At least 56 residents sustained varying degrees of burns and were rushed to different hospitals for treatment.

The tragic incident occurred on Saturday morning when a speeding petrol tanker crashed on Dikko Junction along the expressway between Niger and Kaduna states.

While two eyewitnesses said over 80 people died, the National Emergency Management Agency said 70 residents lost their lives in the explosion.

**How it happened** – Eyewitnesses

Speaking with *Sunday PUNCH*, a resident of Dikko, Ibrahim Suleiman, said he was on a motorcycle heading towards the junction when the tanker crashed.

He noted that the people around were confused, not knowing what to do, and no uniformed man was present to control traffic or warn people to stay away.

"Suddenly, the tanker began to spill fuel and when people saw the fuel, they rushed to the fallen tanker to scoop the fuel. It was then I heard the explosion.

"So many people were there when the tanker exploded. They could be more than 100, but from a distance, I just saw many people going up in flames," Suleiman said.

Another eyewitness, who gave his name as Modestus, said the tanker exploded when the main body of the

vehicle separated from its head.

"Many people who came to scoop fuel from the fallen tanker lost their lives; they were more than 80. I noticed that there were no emergency officials or fire service officers. No rescue from government agents. It was only vigilantes that came around to help. May God have mercy on us and accept the souls of the departed," Modestus said.

## 70 burnt to death

Confirming the incident, the Niger State Commander of the Federal Road Safety Corps, Kumar Tsukwam, assured that his men were on the ground to address the situation.

According to him, a loaded petrol tanker fell at the scene of the incident, and people resorted to scooping fuel.

Tsukwam said those who went to scoop the fuel were engulfed by flames, including those who went to rescue the victims.

While confirming 50 deaths, he said 42 were injured.

"Those injured were taken to hospitals; 23 are at the General Hospital Suleja and another 19 at another hospital, also in Suleja," he said.

The Director-General of the Niger State Emergency Management Agency, Abdullahi Baba-Arah, said 50 persons were burnt to death while others who sustained injuries were taken to hospitals.

In a statement on Saturday, he said, "NSEMA has received a report of a deadly tanker explosion which

took place this morning, January 18, 2024, around 9am along the Dikko-Maje Road, opposite Baddegi Filling Station along the road in Suleja LG.

"The incident occurred when a tanker loaded with PMS crashed, and an attempt was made by the drivers to transfer its contents to a second tanker.

"In the process, the spilling PMS came in contact with a generator that was used to power the transfer process, triggering an explosion that has caused over 50 deaths, injured many people and destroyed property estimated at millions of naira."

Baba-Arah added that the agency, in collaboration with the NEMA, Suleja LG Emergency Committee, and good-hearted volunteers, had begun carrying out a search and recovery operation.

NEMA, in a statement on Saturday, noted that 70 people died, adding that while most of the casualties were burnt beyond recognition, 56 injured persons had been evacuated to nearby hospitals for medical attention.

It said most of the victims were members of the community and passers-by.

The Director General of NEMA, Mrs Zubaida Umar, condemned the act of poor handling of spilled tankers, stressing the recurrent tragedies associated with such risky behaviour.

The NEMA DG expressed regrets that despite the agency's extensive public sensitisation campaigns with

other stakeholders on the dangers of this practice, many individuals continued to ignore the warnings.

"This incident serves as another grim reminder of the need for strict adherence to safety measures during such emergencies," the agency added.

Meanwhile, the Controller-General of the Federal Fire Service, Abdulganiyu Jaji, has called on fuel station owners and tanker operators to address the issue of reckless driving by their drivers, particularly on major roads and hazardous bends.

Speaking to journalists in Abuja on Saturday, Jaji emphasised the urgent need to review and enforce stringent safety protocols for fuel transportation across the country.

He warned that tanker explosions were increasingly frequent and often caused by preventable lapses.

Jaji said, "Fuel station owners and tanker operators should take immediate action in addressing reckless driving by their drivers, especially on major roads and dangerous bends. This will also help reduce the menace."

Reacting to the tragedy, the Niger State Governor, Mohammed Bago, expressed shock and urged residents to prioritise their safety.

The Chief Press Secretary to the Governor, Bologi Ibrahim, who was on Bago's entourage to Suleja and Tafa LGs to inspect state projects, noted that scores of people died.

He said, "The governor describes the explosion as worrisome,

heartbreaking and unfortunate. He specifically sympathises with the families of the victims and prays that Allah will repose the souls of the departed and heal the injured.

"The governor has directed all relevant ministries, departments, and agencies to do what is necessary while urging security agents to ensure security in the area."

## FG orders probe

In a statement by his Special Adviser on Media and Communications, Nneamaka Okafor, the Minister of Petroleum Resources, Senator Heineken Lokpobiri, expressed condolences to the government and people of Niger State over the explosion.

He described the loss of lives and injuries as a heartbreaking tragedy.

Lokpobiri stressed the importance of enhanced safety measures to prevent similar incidents, urging Nigerians to exercise extreme caution in emergencies involving petrol tankers.

He pleaded with the public to avoid approaching fuel tankers after accidents, emphasising the deadly risks involved.

"I cannot overemphasise the dangers. Lives are too precious to be lost unnecessarily. We must all work together to avoid these tragedies," he added.

The minister stated that the Nigerian Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority had been instructed to

launch an investigation into the incident.

"This tragedy is a reminder of the collective responsibility we all share. It is essential that the government, transport operators, and citizens work together to prioritise safety in the distribution of petroleum products," Lokpobiri stated.

## Increasing tanker explosions

The Saturday explosion is the latest in a series of tanker accidents across the country which have claimed many lives and destroyed property within the past four months.

A tanker explosion occurred in Majiya, Jigawa, on October 15, 2024, which killed over 150 people and injured 124 others.

The explosion occurred when a tanker, en route from Kano to Yobe State, overturned near Majiya and led to a massive explosion following a fire which it ignited while residents attempted to collect the spilled fuel.

On September 23, 2024, two people were injured when a fuel-laden tanker exploded on Shehu Shagari Way in the upscale Maitama area of Abuja after colliding with a commercial bus.

Similarly, on September 8, 2024, at least 48 people were killed when a tanker truck collided with another vehicle at Agaie-Lapai Road, in Niger State, which resulted in an explosion.

About 24 hours earlier, another petrol tanker caught fire on Saturday in the Iyana-Ajia area of Egbeda Local Government, Ibadan, destroying multiple vehicles.

# Wike tsunami: VIPs rush to save Abuja property

DANIEL ADAJI and DIRISU YAKUBU

**T**he Federal Capital Territory has become a hotbed for

large-scale projects, preferring to invest in smaller plots ranging from two to four hectares instead of massive land tracts.

People are asking: 'What if my property is revoked too?' This uncertainty is causing a decline in confidence within the market," he

but we believe a more flexible payment schedule would alleviate the pressure many developers and property owners are facing. A

said.

Additionally, Olayinka pointed out the leadership style of the minister, noting his impartial