Oil pipeline explosion kills 12 in Rivers

■ Victims scooping crude oil illegally - Police

FROM **TONY JOHN**, PORT HARCOURT AND **UCHE USIM**, ABUJA

THE Police Command in Rivers has confirmed that 12 persons died in the early Friday morning explosion in Rumuekpe community of Emoha Local Government Area of the state.

The Spokesperson for the command, SP Grace Iringe-Koko, said, in a statement in Port Harcourt, that preliminary investigation indicated that the victims were scooping crude product when the site caught fire.

The explosion occurred as a bus loaded with some siphoned crude went up in flames, as it was leaving the spot for an illegal refinery in the area.

"So far, about 12 persons are believed to have been burnt to death. The identities of the victims are still unknown," she stated.

Iringe-Koko also said that five vehicles and four tricycles were burnt to ashes at the explosion site. The command has admonished members of the public to stay away from the illegal oil business.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), on Friday, said it had begun investigations into the explosion.

The Commission's Chief Executive Officer, Gbenga Komolafe, in a statement, noted that that the causality level had not been determined, even as he assured that the Commission, in line with its statutory regulatory oversight of Upstream Petroleum operations in the Nigerian oil and gas industry, would leave no stone unturned to unravel the immediate and remote causes of the incident.

He added that investigations into the incident would be in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, just as updates would be provided appropriately.

Komolafe said: "Although there are speculations about the level of casualties, the Commission cannot confirm any until after our investigations.

"However, we will take necessary measures to ensure that all safety and environmental measures in line with global best practices to safeguard lives and the environment are put in place," the NUPRC Chief Executive stated.