

18 feared killed in Abia checkpoint auto crash

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From **Okey Sampson**, Umuahia

About 18 passengers were feared dead at a security checkpoint, at the Lokpanta axis of the Enugu-Port Harcourt Expressway, yesterday morning.

It was gathered that an 18-seater bus was on the queue at the checkpoint waiting to be cleared by security men at the checkpoint, when a trailer, said to have lost control, rammed into it, killing some of the passengers and injuring others.

A witness has it that angered by the action of the security agents, which was said to have caused the accident, drivers and commuters came out from their vehicles and blocked the expressway in protest.

The protesters insisted that they would not leave the road until the security operatives that mounted the roadblock were produced. The action held traffic for hours, preventing vehicles from going to Enugu, Umuahia or Aba and other adjoining cities.

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Meanwhile, Governor Alex Otti has ordered an investigation into the tragedy to find out if there was any professional misconduct. Speaking through his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Ferdinand Ekeoma, Otti said anyone found culpable will not be allowed to go scott free. Otti said the government's immediate concern was how to save the lives of the injured passengers and clear the highway for free flow of traffic.

“Our interest, as a government, is to ensure that those who were injured are properly taken care of.”

The governor disclosed that the casualty figure was three as of the time he spoke with the relevant authorities. He assured that efforts were on to clear the road and restore order at the scene.

“I was told that the Mayor of Umuahia has brought in a crane to remove the trailer and that the road, which was completely blocked, has been cleared for easy movement of vehicles”.

Efforts to get a reaction from the police were unsuccessful at the time of this report.