

Enugu tanker explosion: Nnaji condoles victims as death toll rises to 21

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• FRSC partners PTD-NUPENG to check crashes

From **Jude Chinedu**, Enugu

The death toll from Saturday's tanker explosion at the Ugwu-Onyeama axis of the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway has risen to 21.

According to Enugu State Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) Sector Commander, Franklin Agbakoba, three more victims, two men and a woman, died in the hospital due to severe burns.

On January 25, a fuel-laden tanker crashed and exploded killing 11 road users instantly before emergency responders arrived.

Agbakoba revealed that a harmonised report showed the accident involved 44 people, 16 vehicles (both private and commercial) and a tricycle. Besides the casualties, 23 individuals (eight male and 15 female)sustained injuries and were taken to ESUTH, Parklane; the National Orthopedic Hospital, Enugu and the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Ituku-Ozalla.

So far, nine victims (three men and six women) have been discharged while 11 others (three men and eight women) remain hospitalised.

Meanwhile, Minister of Innovation, Science and Technology, Chief Uche Nnaji, has condoled with victims and families.

Nnaji said the devastating incident resulted in significant loss of lives and underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures to prevent such occurrences in the future.

The minister said: “Our thoughts and prayers are with the families who have lost loved ones in this tragic event. We also extend our wishes for a swift recovery to those injured.”

He emphasised the importance of implementing effective strategies to prevent future incidents.

“There should be routine checks of fuel tankers to ensure they meet safety standards, thereby reducing the risk of mechanical failures such as brake malfunctions.

“Launch nationwide campaigns to educate the public on the hazards associated with collecting fuel from accident scenes, highlighting the risks of explosions and health implications.

“Remove roadblocks on hilly or sloping roads, as these often pose significant safety hazards, especially for big vehicles navigating steep inclines or sharp descents.”

The minister also appealed for use of inert gas systems in fuel tankers to prevent explosions by reducing the presence of flammable vapors, as well as the promotion of the development and utilisation of fuel containers equipped with passive protection modules designed to resist explosions.

He reaffirmed his ministry’s commitment to collaborating with relevant agencies and stakeholders to enhance safety measures in fuel transportation.

Meanwhile, the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) is intensifying its partnership with the Petroleum Tankers Drivers (PTD) branch of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) to combat the rising number of tanker crashes on Nigerian roads.

The Corps Marshal, Malam Shehu Mohammed, stated this when he visited the National Chairman, PTD-NUPENG, Augustine Egbon in Abuja, yesterday.

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Mohammed expressed worry over the incessant crashes involving petroleum tankers that claimed many lives and destroyed property worth billions of Naira.

He said the FRSC was aware that most crashes that happened involved independent tanker owners and drivers who were not affiliated to any association or union.

He stressed the need for the PTD-NUPENG and FRSC to revive the 'Safe Load Scheme' which he said empowered the Corps on Pre-Loading and Post-Loading Inspection.

According to him, the FRSC, because of the incessant fuel tanker crashes consuming so many lives, decided to reach out to its critical stakeholders, and this time around, was with the PTD-NUPENG.

“We already have a scheme, which is the “safety load scheme”, where we do preload and post-load inspection of tankers when they take fuel from the depot and the tank farms to various destinations across the country.

“So, we intend to have a forum with all stakeholders so that we strengthen and improve on what we do, especially on that safety load scheme.

“It is also to check other areas where we can do training and retraining of drivers, do more of public education and sensitisation as to a secondary factor, which is the scooping of fuel by the general public around the area,” he said.

The FRSC boss appealed to PTD-NUPENG to place more emphasis on training and retraining of its members for effective and efficient service delivery.

Mohammed believed that working together with stakeholders would assist FRSC in achieving its mandate on reducing road crashes and creating a safe motoring environment.

Egbon assured that the Union would continue to build the capacity of members on safe delivery of petroleum products.

“We do training for our men thrice in a year and FRSC are always present whenever we have these training sessions.

“FRSC and PTD-NUPENG have a good relationship because FRSC inspects the trucks before they load.

“We will sustain that and ensure that road crashes are reduced to the barest minimum.”

The PTD-NUPENG chairman assured that the Union was ready at all times to support FRSC in bringing sanity to Nigerian roads.

Egbon, however, appealed to the government at all levels to make Nigeria roads better.

Also, National Trustee of PTD-NUPENG, Salimon Oladiti, assured that more collaboration between the two agencies would enhance their relationship and effective traffic management in the country.

Highlights of the event were presentation of plaque to the National Chairman, PTD-NUPENG by the FRSC Corps Marshal, group photographs among other activities.