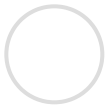


Four family members die in Rivers tanker explosion



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At least four persons lost their lives while several others were injured when a petrol tanker fell, burst into flames while its content poured into a waste water channel surrounded by makeshift settlements in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The victims, among them a woman and a baby, were said to be members of the same family. The tanker fell around Rumuola Junction in central Port Harcourt about 2a.m. on Christmas Day, while its content travelled almost two kilometres in the canal and burnt houses whose occupants were still asleep.

A witness said the four victims were family members who were unable to flee like other residents who survived the fire. Several houses and property worth millions of naira were destroyed, while several others suffered different degrees of burns and were rushed to the hospital by the officials of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Another witness said the tanker skidded off its route

between the road linking Rumuola and the Stadium Road and spilled its content into the canal thereby exploded along the waterways.

The explosion from the tank burnt down the shanty settlement behind the Mopol Nineteen while shops and residential homes were also completely burnt down. Some of the residents faulted the response of the officials of the Rivers State Fire Service, who they accused of not arriving the area early enough after several calls and appeals for urgent intervention to curtail the fire.

“If the fire service had been here in time, the gravity of the situation would not have been this bad,” said one of the residents. “One woman, who escaped the inferno, ran out of her house stark naked and was assisted by her distant neighbours just as all property were burnt by the flame. She lost virtually everything,” said Comrade Christian Lekia of Niger Delta Coalition Against Violence (NDCAV). Lekia, who was at the scene, called on drivers, irrespective of vehicles they drive, to be more careful this harmattan period as speed and bad driving could cause such accident. Meanwhile, the Chairman, Port Harcourt City Council, Hon. Victor Ihunwo, who visited the area, promised to assist the families of the diseased, the injured and those who lost belongings to the incident.

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