

Pregnant woman, baby, 13 others die in tanker explosion



Published 9 hours ago on October 17, 2019

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A pregnant woman and her three-year-old baby, strapped to her back, were among 15 people feared dead while scores of persons were injured when a petrol tanker exploded at Upper Iweka on the Enugu-Onitsha Expressway in Anambra State yesterday.

The tanker crashed at noon after the driver lost control of the vehicle and it burst into flames.

The incident was the second tanker accident on the same spot this year which have claimed over 50 lives.

A witness said the woman had gone back to her shop after escaping from the flame of the fire from the drainage to go and bring out her money.

“The flame which followed the flow of the fuel running through the drainage channel had burnt the plank leading to her shop. As she stepped on the wood, it caved in and she felled into the drainage with the child on her back. Efforts to rescue her proved abortive as the

flame coming from the surging fuel scared sympathisers away,” the witness said.

The accident occurred in front of Tronto Hospital, Onitsha. The head of the tanker pulled off and crashed about half a kilometre away while the trunk burst into flames.

The accident forced traders at Upper Iweka, Ochanaja, Iweka Road and Ozomagala to close shops abruptly as the fire followed the fuel flowing down the streets.

Property and goods worth millions of naira were razed at the Ochanja market, while a branch of a commercial bank was also torched.

Some vehicles were also burnt.

The accident drew out hundreds of onlookers, who thronged the Iweka Road while traders were fighting the fire with sachets water. At the time, firefighters were nowhere to be seen.

Some of the victims at the Ochanja, Agbo Romijus, Fabian Onah and Jude Nnamani, whose goods were completely gutted by fire, said the fire incident took them unawares.

The traders said they were sitting in their shops when suddenly the fire broke out. According to them, before they knew it, the fire had gutted their shops.

“We lost everything we have laboured for in life. We are finished and no hope to overcome this incident,” one of them said.

Nnamani, who was weeping uncontrollably, said “all my goods were gutted by the fire. We are passionately appealing to Governor Willie Obiano of Anambra State to kindly come to our rescue because we have families and dependents and now we have no other hope.”

Witnesses said that an angry mob attacked the police and the Commissioner for Trade, Hon. Uchenna Okafor, who rushed to the scene to ascertain the extent of damage.

On seeing the convoy, the mob started throwing stones and other dangerous weapons at the government officials. This prompted the

security operatives accompanied the officials to shoot sporadically into the air to scare away the surging crowd before they escaped.

The mob also chased away policemen from the Onitsha Central Police Station. In the process, some policemen were injured.

Some of the traders told our correspondents that they were angry because officials of the fire service were not seen anywhere as the fire raged for over six hours.

The state Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Haruna Mohammed, confirmed the death of the woman and her child.

He said the area had been cordoned by the police while investigations were ongoing to find out the immediate and the remote causes of the incident.

Officials of the state Fire Service explained that their operational vehicle had problems on its way to Onitsha from Awka hence the Delta State Fire Service had to come to Onitsha from Asaba to assist in fighting the fire.

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