

Kerosine explosion spreads to Rivers, one killed

By George Onah & Emma Amaize

PORT HARCOURT — THE kerosine fire explosions have spread to Port Harcourt, killing a woman and leaving two sisters severely burnt. The death toll in an earlier fire at the popular Oyuigbo market in the city has already risen to four.

The kerosine fire explosions which began in Warri two weeks ago have already claimed 17 lives with several others receiving treatment for burns.

In the latest incidence in Port Harcourt, the victim, popularly called 'Mama Mercy' was said to be emptying a bottle of kerosine into a customer's container, when a lamp on a nearby table sparked fire. An explosion followed, throwing Mama

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Mercy, a cripple, from her chair to the ground.

Her disability was said to have hampered her escape as she stumbled on spilled adulterated kerosine. The stored quantity of the commodity amplified the fire, causing a huge ball of flame that threatened other houses in the area.

Sympathisers in her neighbourhood of UPE Sand Field, Borokiri, were prevented from assisting to rescue her. The inferno soon engulfed her makeshift dwelling place made of plywood, corrugated iron sheets and cardboard. Mama Mercy was roasted as she could not be helped.

2 sisters burnt by kerosine fire explosion

Also, Okochiri community, Okrika Council area was jolted from its sleep when a kerosine lamp exploded at about 2.30 a.m, critically burning two sisters in their bed after one of them had woken up to put on the family lamp, following a blackout by PHCN.

It was learnt that the adulterated kerosine was bought from a surface tank marketer who claimed to have purchased the commodity from the refinery in the area. This

claim could not be confirmed at the refinery in Eleme.

However, household effects, such as mattresses, books, money and other easily inflammable items were lost to the fire while the hospital and parents of the children (Ine and Darling Siekaye Non-ju) are currently battling to save their lives.

Fear has now gripped residents that the killer kerosine has now reached the city.

4 killed by petrol fire in Onyigbo market

Meanwhile, four persons have so far been confirmed dead in the illegal petrol market in Oyugbo Council area, where 10 stalls, some cars and property running into hundreds of thousands of naira were ruined. Petrol drums were stored in one of the shops which were allegedly ignited by "a burning firewood."

Vanguard investigation showed that 95 per cent of the filling stations in Port Harcourt and environs are without petrol, forcing motorists to travel to Owerri or Aba in Imo and Abia States, respectively, to make their purchases.

However, sellers of condensate have flooded the city, ply-

ing their trade at entrances of petrol stations and strategic places, selling to unsuspecting vehicle owners and commercial motorcyclists.

Government has not been able to stop the illegality even as it has been discovered that 90 per cent of the commodity is sourced from vandalised pipes in oil companies.

Warri fire victims reacting to treatment —Surgeon

Meanwhile, Chief Consultant-Surgeon at the Central Hospital, Warri, Dr. Peter Oside, in charge of the treatment of the victims of the Warri kerosine explosions in the hospital, says the patients are responding well to treatment and there is no cause for apprehension.

Dr. Oside who conducted *Vanguard* round to see some of the patients said the state government had lived up to expectations, adding that two of the victims were discharged in the last two days.

One of them, Mrs. Franca Edoonyia, was, in fact, getting ready to leave for home when *Vanguard* visited the ward and she commended the hospital authorities for their prompt attention and professional handling of their cases.