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Pipeline explosion: Counter-claims over casualty figure

[National News](#) Jun 16, 2009

By Hector Igbikiowubo & Yemie Adeoye

LAGOS — COUNTER-CLAIMS yesterday trailed the body count following a petroleum products pipeline explosion which rocked Ilado Phase 3, a Lagos suburb on Saturday night, with security operatives saying up to 25 bodies had been recovered, while management of the Pipeline Products Marketing Company (PPMC) said it was not aware of any body count.

The PPMC is a subsidiary of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) supplies petroleum

products from the Atlas Cove jetty to the Mosimi depot.

Vanguard investigations at the site of the explosion, yesterday, revealed that there was a stampede following gun shots fired into the air by Naval personnel on patrol who arrived the scene and found people siphoning fuel from the affected pipeline.

A security personnel on guard duty at the site disclosed that he witnessed the incident, adding that when he and his men arrived the scene it was like a market place.

“We fired into the air to disperse the vandals, but this started a stampede which eventually led to the explosion. At least between 25 and 30 persons must have died,” he claimed.

He further explained that all security personnel guarding the pipeline have been ordered to shoot on sight and sink any boat approaching the area except there is prior clearance from their command.

According to him, even some of the seafarers and fishermen have been ordered not to come close to the area from 5p.m as pipeline vandals usually pose as fishermen or seafarers to carry out their illegal activities after dark.

Another operative on inspection of the damaged lines told Vanguard that the attack was started by the vandals who on sighting security operatives started shooting, a development which was repelled by men of the Navy.

When contacted Mr. Ralph Ugwu, spokesman of the PPMC said that he was not aware of any casualty figure resulting from the incident, adding that normalcy has since been restored even as he refused to give a figure to the quantity of product lost as a result of the vandalism.

He stressed that normal supplies has recommenced as engineers of the company worked tirelessly to arrest the situation.

Ugwu also disclosed that it was a journalist who hinted him of the development and that he was even in church at the time firefighters and engineers from the PPMC were battling to put out the fire at the time.

Meanwhile, about 7,000 litres of petrol may have been lost in the incident as Vanguard investigation reveals that there were about 13 boats spotted at the scene of the incident and all of them were laden with about eleven 50-litre kegs each. Twelve of these boats were said to have been sunk during the exchange of gunfire which presumably triggered off the explosion, while the only remaining boat could be seen at phase two jetty tied to a tree and under the watch of heavily armed naval personnel.

The loss which is estimated at about N500,000 is said to be quite minimal when compared to the almost daily loss of petroleum products via the system 2b lines of the PPMC which is about the company's busiest line for transporting refined products in the area.

When contacted, a staff of the Red Cross who pleaded anonymity said that it would be better to speak with the director, adding however that it was investigating claims of loss of lives following the incident.

A police officer at the Snake Island Police Station also revealed that lives were lost following the incident, adding that a search for survivors has been mounted on the waterways.

The Ilado area has become notorious for petroleum products pipeline vandalism, accounting for the deaths of scores of locals who are always caught up in the resulting inferno.



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