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## 15 burnt to death in Lagos tanker fire

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By Our Reporters

LAGOS — No fewer than 15 people were burnt to death when a tanker laden with petrol fell and went up in flames Tuesday night. The inferno lasted till yesterday morning, at the Berger Suya junction, Apapa, Lagos. Also, several buildings, eight vehicles and about 200 lock-up shops including a commercial bank in the area were razed. There were, however, conflicting accounts of the number of casualties.

While Federal Fire Service and National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, put the figure at 15, the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency, LASEMA, and the State fire service said only five bodies were recovered. The fire which started at about 10:35pm on Tuesday was said to have been caused by a tanker laden with 33,000 litres of petrol which lost control as it was negotiating a sharp bend. It exploded close to suya spots in the area.



(<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/01/10-burnt-death-lagos-tanker-fire/apapa-tanker-fire/>)

\*The Tanker that exploded at Berger Suya, Apapa Expressway, Lagos, yesterday. Photo: Kehinde Gbadamosi.

The driver of the truck, his assistant, several passengers in two commercial buses, by-standers and two Hausa suya

[www.vanguardngr.com/2014/01/15-burnt-death-lagos-tanker-fire/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/01/15-burnt-death-lagos-tanker-fire/)

vendors were burnt beyond recognition. Rescue workers were seen picking and collecting bones and burnt human parts into cellophane bags. A commercial bank was not spared as a part of the building which housed the Automated Teller Machines, ATMs, was badly damaged.

Eyewitnesses said that the bank guard was trapped and burnt in the inferno. Fire fighters led by the Director, Lagos State Fire Service, Fadipe Razaq Idowu, had hectic time combating the fire which lasted about five hours. Speaking with Vanguard early yesterday, Idowu stated that the team which comprises 21 officials responded promptly with three fire trucks each containing 10,000 litres of water. According to him, each of the trucks was replenished three times.

He said: "The State Fire service responded with three fire trucks, each containing 10,000 litres and was replenished three times. We also used 600 litres of synthetic chemical foam to stop the raging fire, if not, the whole building would have been razed." Idowu disclosed that the tanker which was carrying about 33,000 litres of petrol, went up in flames after it lost control when trying to negotiate a bend at the Berger Suya Junction leading to Wilmer. Reacting to the number of deaths recorded, Idowu stated that five bodies were evacuated by Lagos State Environmental Unit at the spot.

The General Manager, Lagos State Emergency Management Agency, LASEMA, Dr. Femi Oke-Osanyintolu, said 15 people died in the conflagration. But an eyewitness said more than 15 people were burnt beyond recognition. "It will be more than that (15 people). They don't know what they are saying. Two buses which were at the spot when the incident happened caught fire and all the occupants were burnt. The suya sellers including a woman selling orange at the junction were burnt.

#### Victim wails

One of the executives of the Berger Suya Traders Association, Gabriel Ojum, cried that they were like orphans now having lost everything they had laboured for. He said he lost more than N5 million worth of goods to the inferno. He disclosed that more than 200 shops were affected with goods burnt. Ojum pointed to another member of the executive of the union who lost about 30 articulated vehicle engines, each costing about N850,000.

#### How it happened

An eyewitness, who resides in the area told Vanguard that the tanker, which number plate could not be identified was coming from Kirikiri jetty and lost control probably as a result of brake failure. He said the tanker fell as it was trying to negotiate a bend and caught fire immediately. "As it lost control, the truck fell close to the suya spot at the junction with its content spilling across the road into the immediate environment, from the suya furnace it wildly spread to the street.

The driver and the conductor were trapped in the truck which was burnt beyond recognition. Two buses which were carrying several passengers were also burnt without a survivor. A woman who sold oranges at the junction; a guard in the bank was also burnt to death. Some policemen at the junction were also not spared. But I don't know whether they (the policemen) survived it or not."

On how it spread to the adjoining street where about 200 shops were affected, another resident, who also lost goods worth about N5million to the inferno said: "As the tanker fell, its content (petrol) spilled and flowed into the gutters and as the fire began, it spread immediately to the gutters, linking the shops and vehicles parked along the road. The entire area was gutted.

We immediately reached the fire service, which responded promptly." An eyewitness said the fire was put out at around

3:00 am yesterday with property and goods estimated at N500million destroyed. This is a bad New Year gift —Victims Edwin Ibe, who had just returned from his village for the Christmas celebration said he lost more than N45 million worth of goods. He described the incident as bad new year gift.

A middle aged father of six who spoke amid tears, lamented: “As you can see, I lost a lot of money here. Not only that my engines worth more than N25 million got burnt to ashes, a fairly new trailer that I recently acquired which is worth over N15m was also burnt.” Promise Lezieanya, a trader, absolved the tanker driver of blame saying “he tried his best to manoeuvre shouting that the truck had lost its brake as he was approaching the junction.

“A commercial bus by the side which was fully loaded with passengers to Wilmer got burnt. No one survived in the bus. I counted more than 28 people, 94 shops, eight motorcycles and eight vehicles that were burnt that night. I lost 38 pieces of engines to the fire outbreak each at the rate of N1.1m and a new truck that I had sold at the rate of N7million but had not delivered to the owners. All the Okada riders that used to stay at the junction were all burnt to ashes,” he narrated.

Fire fighters No fewer than 21 men from the state fire service were busy fighting the fire with about 90,000 litres of water. The State Director, Lagos State fire service, Fadipe Razaq Idowu stated that apart from the fact that three trucks were used, they also used 600 litres of synthetic chemical foam to stop the raging fire. He, however, acknowledged the support of private fire units of Julius Berger and the Navy which complemented the state fire service to combat the inferno.

#### Looting spree

Razaq told Vanguard that street urchins had a field day looting as the fire was raging. He noted, “Many of them were carrying machete, sledge hammer and other dangerous weapons trying to loot. They impeded our work, we would have recorded more successes if they had stayed out of our way.” Another eyewitness indicated that looters were trying to gain access into the ATM compartment of the affected bank just as others were busy vandalising property around.

Lagos government reacts Lagos State Government yesterday described the Apapa fire incident which killed 15 people as a shock,saying “in order to avoid this, that was why the state government embarked on the enforcement of the 2012 road traffic law.” Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Lateef Ibirogba, while reacting to the inferno said: “We noted it and have always advised full compliance with the Lagos Road Traffic Law 2012 in terms of maintenance of vehicle road worthiness, compliance with speed limits and use of indicator lights.

“That’s why we also reorganised and strengthened our Vehicle Inspection Agency. There’s often a tendency for tanker drivers to resist enforcement, gang up and threaten to withdraw their service. We must all resist this and insist on full compliance with the Law.” Lagos records 194 fire incidents in 39 days The inferno was the 194th fire incident that Lagos would witness in 39 days since December 2013. As of Tuesday, Mr Rasak Fadipe, told the News Agency of Nigeria, NAN, that 193 fire outbreaks had occurred in Lagos within the last one month. Before the Berger Suya disaster, Fadipe said the last incident occurred on January 7 at about 3.08 a.m., at Sawmill Market, Ipaja, Lagos.

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