

30 die in Rivers illegal oil tapping point explosion



File image of a pipeline explosion scene.

By Daniel Abia, Port Harcourt

No fewer than 30 persons have lost their lives in an explosion at an illegal oil tapping point in Omoku, Ogba/Egebema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The tragedy struck Sunday morning, when the youths allegedly broke a pipeline belonging to one of the multinational oil firms operating in the areas and started using jerrycans and buckets to scoop fuel.

While 30 persons are feared dead, many suffered varying degrees of burns and are receiving treatment in different hospitals in the area.

A source in the community said: "It is a very terrible incident. Imagine the death of 30 people in such a time. We learnt some youths burst a company pipeline.

The source said: "If you go to the General Hospital and other private clinics in Omoku, you will see many of the injured people scattered all over the place in both government and private hospitals receiving treatment.

"The inferno occurred as a result of attempts by suspected oil thieves to light mosquito coils.

"The leakage was from an obsolete pipeline belonging to one of the oil companies operating in the area."

Speaking also, chairman of Niger Delta Youth Movement, ONELGA chapter, Emeka Ukwuosah, advised youths in the area to engage in meaningful activities and shun oil bunkering.

Ukwuosah said: "Let me join in condemning the oil bunkering going on within ONELGA. We are also calling on the security agencies to be up and doing and check what is happening within that circle.

"Second, we are calling on the multinationals that own the oil facilities to overhaul their aging facilities to forestall such incidents."

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On his part, the Assistant Secretary of a vigilante group in the area, Onelga Security Peace Advisory Council, Emeka Agbabere, blamed the incident on illegal oil bunkering.

Agbabere said the vigilante group, the Community Development Committee and youths were directed by a monarch in the area to put a stop to oil bunkering activities there.

He expressed dismay that despite their repeated campaigns for the youths to stop illegal bunkering, they refused to listen.

He said: "We proclaimed that they must put a stop to it and this is the aftermath of it. When they bursted the pipeline, fire engulfed immediately and 19 of them died instantly and about 12 in two different hospitals."

Contacted, spokesperson of the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, said she would find out and get back to our reporter. Iringe-Koko was yet to do so at press time.