

# Tank and Petroleum Use Mishaps

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**By learning about the misfortunes of others, it is STI's hope to educate the public by creating a greater awareness of the hazards with storage and use of petroleum and chemicals. Please refer to the many industry standards and to the fire and building codes for further guidance on the safe operating practices with hazardous liquids. Thanks and credit for content are given to Dangerous Goods-Hazmat Group Network.**  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DangerousGoods/>

## **SCOTLAND, DUNDEE**

**DECEMBER 2 2007.**

### **GASOLINE LEAK AT FIFE PLANT**

*Lars Niven*

A major incident was averted at Shell UK's natural gas liquids plant in Fife yesterday afternoon after gasoline started leaking from a storage tank.

Twenty tonnes of the highly flammable liquid spilled into a safety tank beneath the storage area where firefighters smothered it with foam.

At the height of the incident no fewer than seven fire engines from across the region as well as Fife Fire and Rescue Service's emergency tender were at the scene.

The drama began shortly before 1.30pm when gas monitors fitted to the storage tanks set off an alarm at the plant.

Shell UK's own emergency procedures kicked in immediately and staff were able to stop the leak within 10 minutes.

A spokeswoman for the company told The Courier, "There was a leak of gasoline from one of the storage tanks of around 20 tonnes.

"It was all contained underneath the tank in something called a tank bund, which is like a specially designed container specifically in case there are leaks.

"The source was quickly isolated and the leak was stopped within 10 minutes.

"There was no risk of ignition as foam was applied to the bund."

She added, "All personnel have been accounted for and no one was injured."

The NGL plant is part of the Mossmorran petrochemical complex near Cowdenbeath, which Shell shares with US oil giant ExxonMobil.

About 100 staff and contractors are employed by Shell at the 630-acre site, which extracts gasoline, ethane, propane and butane from natural gas liquids from the St Fergus gas plant in the north-east of Scotland for export by sea tanker or pipeline to other plants.

<http://www.thecourier.co.uk/output/2007/12/01/newsstory10629915t0.asp>

## **USA, MN, CLEARBROOK**

**DECEMBER 2 2007.**

### **PIPELINE FIRE TRACED TO PINHOLE LEAK**

*Dave Kolpack*

An oil pipeline explosion that killed two workers and caused a spike in oil prices can be traced back to a pinhole leak first repaired three weeks ago, the company said.

The fire was extinguished Thursday morning, and oil prices ended the day just slightly higher after it became clear that the Enbridge Energy pipeline would come back on line quickly.

Enbridge spokesman Larry Springer said Friday that workers were trying to remove leaked oil from around

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the pipeline. Once that's done it can be repaired.

He said the company still hoped to have the pipeline fixed within a few days, and that it was running at 80 percent of capacity in the meantime.

The pinhole leak was fixed with a repair sleeve earlier this month.

On Wednesday, workers shut down the pipeline to remove the 11-foot section that included the pinhole and sleeve. They replaced it with a new section of pipeline, but oil apparently leaked at a section where that joined the old line, said Leon Zupan, Enbridge's vice president of operations.

The killed workers were identified by Enbridge on Thursday as Dave Mussati Jr. and Steve Arnovich, both contract workers from its Superior, Wis., office.

Houston-based Enbridge Energy Inc.'s pipeline carries crude oil from Saskatchewan to the Chicago area. The area where the fire occurred, Clearbrook, is about 215 miles northwest of Minneapolis.

It carries roughly 16 percent of U.S. crude imports, and oil prices shot up more than \$4 early Thursday when word of the fire first reached oil markets. But three of the four lines were operating by that afternoon. The company said the fourth line, where the fire occurred, would probably be usable again in two or three days.

The crude is used to make several kinds of fuel, such as gasoline and home heating oil.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5i-9v1oy7WDwq-XtZ3H2KjDgnVA5AD8T842SG2>

## **USA, MN, ST PAUL PARK**

**DECEMBER 2 2007.**

### **1 WORKER MISSING IN ST. PAUL OIL REFINERY FIRE**

*Jody Ambroz*

One employee at the Marathon Petroleum Refinery in St. Paul Park is missing after an explosion and fire inside the plant Saturday morning. The employee was fixing a gauge on an oil tank when it exploded around 8:20 a.m. No injuries are reported.

The fire was confined to one tank on the south side of the plant -- the No. 6 fuel tank, which holds fuel oil, not crude oil as initially reports suggested.

Firefighters are trying to figure out what sparked the fire and it is unknown if the tank had a malfunction. Firefighters did not know the worker was missing until they did a final head count.

The missing man, a three-year employee of the plant, clocked into work, but didn't clock out or leave the building. A co-worker talked with him moments before, and he was seen in the vicinity of the tank before the explosion. St. Paul Park police are assisting the plant in the search for the employee. No more information about the man will be released until family members are notified.

Firefighters from several communities put out the fire by 9:30 a.m., Washington County officials said. Firefighters from St. Paul Park, Newport, Cottage Grove, Woodbury, Maplewood and Inver Grove Heights were dispatched to the refinery. Foam that is always stored at the plant for fire emergencies was used to put out the fire.

The plant supplies oil products to the Twin Cities area and Western Wisconsin. Marathon says most gasoline produced at the refinery is marketed locally at SuperAmerica stations. The explosion should not impact supplies or access to supplies and no other tanks were destroyed in the explosion.

<http://www.myfoxtwincities.com/myfox/pages/Home/Detail;jsessionid=12A93BA8EDF6EFB9981CC658F24F65DE?contentId=5095064&version=8&locale=EN-US&layoutCode=TSTY&pageId=1.1.1&sflg=1>

## **USA, MO, KANSAS CITY**

**DECEMBER 7 2007.**

### **VANDALISM BLAMED FOR 6,000 GALLON GASOLINE SPILL**

Officials believe a vandal caused a 6,000-gallon gasoline spill from a storage tank near Hutchinson.

Authorities say whoever was responsible for the spill at Ramsey Oil went to a lot of trouble to cause it. No arrests have been made. The company reported the spill Wednesday after employees found that the fuel had leaked from an above-ground tank on farmland southwest of Nickerson. Ramsey Oil owner Loren Alderson said he believes the vandalism took place overnight Monday or early Tuesday. Alderson said he planned to have a contractor start moving the dirt today. Kansas Department of Health and Environment spokesman Joe Blubaugh said crews may use a cleanup method called land farming, in which thin layers of contaminated dirt are spread over the land to allow evaporation.

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[http://www.kansascity.com/news/breaking\\_news/story/392195.html](http://www.kansascity.com/news/breaking_news/story/392195.html)

**USA, MO, FERGUSON**

**DECEMBER 19 2007.**

## **21,000 GALLONS OF FUEL LEAK AT FERGUSON GAS STATION**

Investigators in Ferguson believe some twenty-one thousand gallons of gasoline have leaked from a QuickTrip gas station in the ninety-four hundred block of West Florissant.

As of noon on Tuesday, the big question Missouri's Department of Natural Resources was still looking into was how could so much gasoline, twenty-one thousand gallons worth, disappear without QuickTrip employees noticing, and sounding alarm?

While that was still a mystery for investigators, Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District officials say they do know that on December 10th, QuickTrip did make a repair to a valve they thought had been leaking.

That repair came after employees noticed some gasoline accounting problems in their books.

QuickTrip thought the repair solved their problem.

But, this past Friday, Ferguson firefighters were called to check out a sewer pipe near the gas station, where neighbors had been complaining of gasoline fumes.

Sewer and state environmental investigators were quickly called in, when explosive levels of gas fumes were detected.

They tracked leaking gasoline back to the QuickTrip, and found another leak in the gas station's underground storage tank system.

Initially, QuickTrip estimated it was short about seventeen hundred gallons of gas, but investigators quickly determined the figure was more like twenty-one thousand gallons.

As of noon Tuesday a QuickTrip spokesman in Tulsa would only say, "several thousand gallons," had spilled.

At that same time officials said some ten thousand gallons were still unaccounted for in their clean up effort.

"Twenty-one thousand gallons of gasoline is a huge amount of gasoline. It has a negative impact on our environment. Unfortunately, that's where most of it seems to have gone. Yes, we have been able to recover approximately half of it, and we'll make every effort to recover whatever else we can. But, there are several thousand gallons of gasoline, that probably made it out into the environment, that is going to have an impact on the environment," Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District spokesman, Lance LeComb told us.

A significant cleanup operation has been underway since Friday, not only in underground storage tank capture basins, but also cleaning up gas that leaked into ground water, soil, and into a creek running next to the gas station.

QuickTrip will be forced to pay all clean-up costs, and the company could also face fines.

Fortunately, M.S.D. says gasoline vapor levels have diminished in the area around the gas station, along with the threat of any possible explosion as a result of the leak.

Still, M.S.D. planned to monitor the situation through Tuesday night.

Missouri's Department of Natural Resources says gas stations are responsible for monitoring and measuring their own gasoline levels. D.N.R. also says between nine to ten percent of all the environmental emergency calls they get are from service stations leaking some type of fuel.

However, officials tell us they usually find gas stations leaking hundreds of gallons of fuel, rather than thousands of gallons.

[http://www.ksdk.com/news/news\\_article.aspx?storyid=136994](http://www.ksdk.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=136994)

**USA, FLA, JACKSONVILLE**

**DECEMBER 19 2007.**

## **4 KILLED, 14 INJURED IN EXPLOSION, 3-ALARM FIRE BILLOWING BLACK SMOKE COULD BE SEEN FOR MILES**

More than 100 firefighters and every hazardous-materials unit in Jacksonville battled what a spokesman called a "hellish inferno" that followed an explosion of a chemical company on the Northside on Wednesday afternoon.

Nearly two hours after the blast ignited the industrial facility on Faye Road, a Jacksonville Fire-Rescue

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spokesman confirmed that three people died and 14 people were transported to area hospitals. Just after 6 p.m., JFRD said a fourth victim had died.

Officials could not confirm whether anyone was still missing, but firefighters continued to battle hot spots and likely will all night.

"This was unlike any noise I'm sure any of us have ever heard," Kevin, who works at the port on Blount Island, told Channel 4. "It literally shook the whole building. We walked outside and saw what was reminiscent of a nuclear explosion -- that kind of cloud formation you see when a nuclear explosion goes off."

Callers to Channel 4 described a flash, an explosion and a mushroom cloud that was reported at 1:33 p.m. After the initial explosion, thick, black smoke and flames billowed from the area for 90 minutes.

Hospitals were put on mass-casualty alert. Four hospitals received patients, with Shands-Jacksonville Medical Center decontaminating the 11 victims who arrived there. A Shands trauma physician said one person was in critical condition, three were in fair condition and seven were in good condition. Most of the injuries were fractures and exposure to chemicals, doctors said.

Initially, six people were reported missing, but three of them were located, Jacksonville Fire-Rescue spokesman Tom Francis said. By evening, he said everyone was accounted for.

"The incident is so violent and the fire is still so volatile ... we have not been able to ascertain directly yet what materials are present," Francis said in announcing that a one-half mile radius was being evacuated.

That evacuation was lifted just after 4 p.m. after the fire was under control and air monitoring showed no presence of hazardous chemicals.

The explosion at T2 Labs, a chemical company that makes solvents and gasoline additives, became a three-alarm fire, with firefighters taking extra precautions because of potential hazardous conditions.

"It was a pandemonium," said Byron Evetts, an engineer working at the JEA plant who is also a trained rescue worker. "It was a large explosion.... Best we could tell, there was no structure left. It was like the entire structure had been removed."

Evetts said the explosion was so violent that steel beams and other debris were scattered everywhere.

"There was like this tremendous boom like I've never heard in my life," said Shannon Story, who works nearby. "Everything shook in the building, the power went out, light bulbs fell from ceiling. We all evacuated as fast as we could."

People in the area initially thought the explosion was at one of the JEA's two Northside generating stations. The explosion occurred about one block from St. Johns River Power Park, the coal plant jointly operated by the JEA and Florida Power and Light.

A JEA spokeswoman said the concussion knocked briefly two generating units off-line. The facilities were evacuated of all but essential personnel.

The Red Cross opened Oceanway Elementary School as a shelter. Little Temple Child Care Center was evacuated and the children and workers relocated to Oceanway Elementary. By early evening, everyone was gone and the shelter closed.

"Having toured the facility, the damage is really almost hard to comprehend," Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton said. "You see power lines have snapped overhead. All of the buildings surrounding this facility have experienced some type of (damage). Windshields have smashed, the walls are caved in."

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration as well as a team from the U.S. Chemical Safety Board were sending investigators. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office homicide unit also launched an investigation.

Police blocked traffic on Faye Road between Alta Drive and New Berlin Road, but residents with identification or people with business in the area are being allowed through. The state Road 9A exits at Alta reopened about 6 p.m.

<http://www.news4jax.com/news/14890696/detail.html>

## **USA, FLA, JACKSONVILLE**

**DECEMBER 20 2007.**

### **VICTIMS OF CHEMICAL BLAST IDENTIFIED, FOCUS TURNS TO CAUSE**

With the fire out and the bodies of four men killed recovered from the remains of the chemical company that exploded and was consumed by an inferno on Wednesday, the focus of efforts at the scene shifted to finding a cause of the blast and rebuilding the neighborhood.

Investigators from four federal agencies joined Jacksonville homicide detectives and the state fire marshal at the scene of Wednesday's massive explosion and fire that took four lives and sent 14 others to area hospitals.

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"It looked like one of those roadside bombs you see in Iraq you see on TV," said Anthony Faranella, who was working just 500 feet away when the building exploded. "The destructive power was just phenomenal."

Teams from the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, National Safety and Health Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board and the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms arrived at what's left of the T2 Laboratories facility.

Thursday morning, Jacksonville Fire-Rescue officials removed the last two bodies from the site and identified the four people killed -- all employees of T2 Labs, one of whom was a co-owner of the company.

"This particular accident most likely has the highest rank of any we've looked at in 2007 and one of the highest that the agency has investigated," said Bob Hall of the federal Chemical Safety Board. "This is a very serious accident, compared to what is normally seen in the industry."

Businesses in the immediate area remained closed while safety inspectors assessed the structural integrity of the buildings. One neighboring facility had a wall blown out and the roof collapsed.

"It has the appearance of somewhat of an earthquake, where the buildings have been shaking, literally," Jacksonville Sheriff's Office spokesman Ken Jefferson said.

An estimated 1,000 people who work in the area were kept out Thursday, but a few of the business owners were allowed to inspect their property.

"We're about 300 yards from where the explosion was and it's heavily damaged," said Brian Almony. "A lot of glass broken out and all the walls inside buckled."

JEA crews were restoring power in the area and a CSX rail crew was making repairs to damaged tracks behind the explosion site. There was no word on when the area would be reopened.

The 1:30 p.m. explosion at the chemical manufacturing plant on Faye Road -- about one block from the coal-fired electric plant on Heckscher Drive -- was felt by people several miles away and the column of black smoke could be seen from as far as 70 miles away in coastal Georgia.

"There was like this tremendous boom like I've never heard in my life," said Shannon Story, who works nearby. "Everything shook in the building, the power went out, light bulbs fell from ceiling. We all evacuated as fast as we could."

Witnesses described a flash, an explosion and a mushroom cloud above the plant that manufactures chemical solvents and fuel additives.

When the first firefighters arrived, steel and debris were flying through the air.

"The incident is so violent and the fire is still so volatile ... we have not been able to ascertain directly yet what materials are present," Jacksonville Fire-Rescue spokesman Tom Francis said in announcing that a one-half mile radius was evacuated.

More than a dozen victims were transported to four area hospitals, where they were decontaminated upon arrival. Of the 11 patients taken to Shands-Jacksonville Medical Center, one was in critical condition, three fair, seven good and one had been released. Doctors said most of the injuries were from broken bones and chemical exposure.

By late afternoon, with the fire under control and the air quality declared safe, the evacuations were lifted and officials began assessing the damage.

"Nothing there resembles a building," Mayor John Peyton said. "It's amazing when you see the scene that there wasn't more loss of life."

Neighboring businesses were also damaged, one losing a wall and the ceiling collapsing. Shrapnel from the explosion fell at the JEA plant a quarter-mile away.

Byron Evetts, an engineer working at the JEA plant who is also a trained rescuer, rushed to the scene to try and help.

"There were large, structural beams lying hundreds of yards from the scene. It looked like a war zone," Evetts said.

Faye Road between Alta Drive and New Berlin Road remained closed to all but official traffic Thursday morning. Officials said the closure could last some time.

<http://www.news4jax.com/news/14896144/detail.html>

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**USA, KY, LEXINGTON**

**DECEMBER 20 2007.**

**FUEL LEAK ENTERS WOLF RUN CREEK**

*Charles Bertram*

A substance thought to be diesel fuel was found floating on the surface of Wolf Run Creek west of downtown Lexington yesterday.

The Lexington fire department quickly put several booms across the creek to catch the slick, said Richard Peddicord, an assistant state fire marshal who was on the scene.

"So far, we're looking at a real good containment on it," Peddicord said.

Recent rain has increased the creek's flow, which helped to dissipate the spill, he said. Wolf Run is a tributary of the Town Branch of Elkhorn Creek.

The slick was traced to an industrial park on Old Frankfort Pike just inside New Circle Road, Peddicord said. The leak appeared to come from an above-ground storage tank about 400 feet from the creek.

He said he didn't know how large the tank was or who owned it. The property had been occupied by Norwood Construction, he said, but officials had not determined the identity of the current occupant.

A private contractor was brought in to contain and clean up the spill.

<http://www.kentucky.com/211/story/262932.html>

**USA, FLA, JACKSONVILLE**

**DECEMBER 22 2007.**

**WITNESSES: PIPE RUPTURED BEFORE DEADLY EXPLOSION - THEY DESCRIBE FRANTIC EFFORT TO PREVENT HORROR THAT FOLLOWED**

*Bridget Murphy*

At the blast site's ground zero Thursday, investigators compared damage in the half-mile area to the aftermath of an earthquake.

But after rescue workers finished recovering the remains of four Jacksonville chemical plant workers who died there a day earlier, there was another measure of the devastation.

The blast that fueled flames taller than a highway overpass, spiked steel I-beams through tractor-trailers and rocked nearby warehouses with a sound wave also severed families.

It left four women without husbands and nine children without fathers or stepfathers.

Authorities said they found all the deceased in the same building on the Northside property of T2 Laboratories Inc. on Faye Road.

Police identified the victims as company co-owner Scott Gallagher, 51, and employees Karey Henry, 35, Parish Ashley, 36, and Charles Bolchoz, 48. The disaster injured 14 others, with one of them still in critical condition Thursday.

U.S. Chemical Safety Board investigators arrived from Washington to work with other federal, state and local officials who will dissect physical evidence, safety records and witness accounts to figure out the cause of the eruption at the plant where workers manufactured fuel additives.

Two eyewitnesses who saw what happened in the moments before the blast spoke Thursday to the Times-Union.

Bill Adkins, a 52-year-old supervisor at Holland Sandblasting and Coating, said he saw a pipe rupture at the top of a three-story square tower on T2's property about 200 yards away from where he was standing.

"A white cloud of stuff started coming up," he said. "Then a white cloud came up from the ground. Then an explosion the size of a football field. The fireball and the sound and the percussion took our breath away."

From next door at Tri-State Contractors, foreman Lee Bingaman said he saw T2 employees urgently working together on something 10 minutes before the explosion.

"They were out there trying to figure out what was going on," Bingaman said.

Bingaman, 31, said he told his own employees to stop welding because he thought their torches might spark up any substances leaked from the plant.

Minutes later, the man saw the plant's pipe break loose. It let out a loud hiss. Then the big bang. From 50 feet away, it knocked him to the ground.

T2 Labs built its facility in 2004 and moved in the next year, according to Florida Department of Environmental Protection records.

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Employees from the state agency's hazardous waste program inspected the building in January, finding a single minor rule violation because a container of used oil wasn't properly labeled, according to the records. A note in state records said the city of Jacksonville's environmental inspectors examined the plant in February and didn't find any hazardous waste problems.

Whatever went wrong, the chemical board's lead investigator, Robert Hall, said officials from his agency will spend up to 18 months probing the cause. Then investigators can make safety recommendations to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, an agency that can issue citations and fines.

Police said the portion of Faye Road closest to the plant would stay closed indefinitely. Officers escorted business owners behind police tape Thursday so they could get a look at the damage to their businesses.

Many employers had no choice but to send workers home after they mustered by a roadblock at Faye and Alta roads after sunrise. Many clotted around their personal pickup trucks, some drinking coffee while remembering their close calls Wednesday, some even bowing their heads and praying together.

"You just don't think about it," Adkins, the sandblasting company supervisor, said of the dangers industrial workers face every day. "You're there working, trying to make a living."

[http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/122107/met\\_227484863.shtml](http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/122107/met_227484863.shtml)

### **NIGERIA, LAGOS, VICTORIA ISLAND, IRU, ADAGBO**

**DECEMBER 26 2007.**

#### **50 DIE IN LAGOS PIPELINE EXPLOSION**

*Peter Ailuorio*

At least, 50 people were roasted alive yesterday at Adagbo village of Iru, Victoria Island local government Area of Lagos State.

The victims were said to be scooping fuel from a vandalised pipeline when the fire started at the scene and was followed by an explosion.

Leadership could not immediately establish the cause of the fire, but it is believed to have resulted from a scramble by men, women and children who were fetching fuel from the vandalised pipeline.

An official of the Nigeria Red Cross told our reporter at the scene of the explosion that over 45 people have been removed from the scene, but that the figures were still being compiled.

The incident is coming exactly one year after an explosion and blaze at a vandalised oil pipeline in Abule-Egba area killed 200 people and left dozens with various degrees of injuries.

More than 2,000 people have died in series of similar tragedies in the last few years mainly in the volatile Niger Delta region.

Meanwhile, the occupants of No. 77, Aroloya Street in Lagos Island celebrated Christmas in sadness following the collapse of their building as a result of a fire outbreak. Leadership checks revealed that the fire started at about 3pm on Monday from the first floor of the three-storey building which is used as a residence leading to final collapse of the building yesterday.

Despite the efforts of neighbours and men of the fire services to put out the fire, the building still collapsed.

As at press time last night, the number of casualties had not been ascertained and no one had been reported dead.

It would be recalled that the case of storey building collapse has been taking its toll on Lagosians in recent times, with several casualties.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200712260001.html>

### **NIGERIA, ABUJA**

**DECEMBER 27 2007.**

#### **ONE CHRISTMAS AND 45 FUNERALS**

*Eugene Agha, Fidelia Okwuonu Lagos and Patrick Ugeh*

It was yet another Christmas last Tuesday. It was also another experience with tragedy. Forty-five of those who chose to savour the yuletide season in different way - scooping petrol from a damaged pipeline - lost their lives.

The dead included children, men and women of different ages.

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They lost their lives when a Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) pipeline exploded at Aba-agbo village, Iru near Victoria Island, Lagos.

The victims of the explosion were all given mass burial yesterday at the scene of the fire.

The burial took place in the early hours of yesterday in the village.

Lagos State Commissioner for Health, Dr Jide Idris, said the victims were buried to prevent epidemics in the affected area, adding that the state health officials had also commenced fumigation of the affected coast-line.

He appealed to the Federal Government and the NNPC to encase the pipelines and warned Lagos residents to desist from scooping fuel from vandalised pipelines as history had shown that the effects had always been catastrophic.

The Federal Government described the vandalism of pipelines conveying petroleum products by thieves as worrisome and warned that it would no longer tolerate the criminal act.

Yesterday, the people of Aba-gbo, which lie on the creeks on the outskirts of Lagos, were still going about their daily chores as if oblivious of what had happened.

They were reluctant to attend to newshounds' enquiries about the tragic incident.

Debris left behind by the fire, which has since been put out, was still all over the place when THISDAY visited the place yesterday.

Left behind at the scene were some jerry-cans, tied together in bunches, which littered the bushes around the scene of the explosion.

There were also some pipes and funnels apparently used to fill the jerry-cans, some of which had melted.

The area wore a perfume of fuel and smoke still billowing from tree stumps.

There was no immediate indication as to what had caused the fire, which left burnt palm trees and other trees all over the place.

But it was learnt that pipeline vandals had earlier cut open a section of the pipeline ferrying refined petroleum products from the Atlas Cove Jetty, Lagos, to depots in the South-West part of the country and stole large quantities of the products.

When the villages found the vandalised pipelines open and gushing out petroleum products, some of them decided to help themselves.

Rescue workers, which included, policemen from the Lagos State Police Command, state government officials, Nigerian Red Cross Society and some fishermen were still searching for more bodies.

Charred clothing scattered all over the bushes indicate perhaps that some of those caught in the blaze may have managed to pull off their burning oil-soaked dresses as they fled.

THISDAY saw that part of the surface covering the pipeline was dug, laying bare a punctured pipeline, which indicated that the vandalism must have been well-organised.

Some of the villagers alleged that those involved belong to the same cartel of wealthy individuals who go to the villages to recruit peasants to do the actual scooping for them. The business of scooping fuel, they added, was an exclusive reserve of the high and mighty.

A few hundred metres from the scene of the fire, there were also a series of holes dug into the sand which seemed to indicate earlier unsuccessful attempts by vandals to locate the pipeline.

But the Baale of Aba-agbo Village, Chief Nurudeen Idowu, exonerated the people of the village from pipeline vandalism.

Speaking with THISDAY in his palace, the chief said when he heard the explosion in the early hours of Christmas, he asked his subjects to alert security agents and NNPC.

According to him, the bodies of the victims had been hastily buried at the scene of the explosion, in three mass graves.

He described the incident as the handwork of strangers who came into the village on the eve of the Christmas, hiding under the canopy of the festive period to carry out their nefarious activity.

He lamented that the village had never witnessed a case of pipeline explosion in the past.

In line with tradition which forbids traditional rulers from seeing dead bodies, Idowu said though he was not at the burial, he added, however, that he was not aware that any of his subjects died in the explosion.

The Minister of Information and Communications, Chief John Odey, said: "This present administration is not only going to govern in line with the provision of our laws, the government is equally determined to ensure maximum protection for lives and properties of Nigerians from criminal elements.

"The Federal Government can no longer tolerate acts of vandalism to our national infrastructure".

He stated that the Federal Government was shocked and saddened by the "unfortunate news" of the

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death that "occurred in the suburb of Lagos as a result of illegal activities of pipeline vandals."

Odey said this was particularly so in view of the extensive efforts of the present administration to ensure safety of life and property of all Nigerians irrespective of their status in the society.

"At a time when Nigerians were savouring the peace and joy of the Yuletide season, it is sad that a group of criminals could go about to engage in acts that could slow down our development," he said.

The minister remarked that it was unfortunate that some people could still attempt to embark on criminal activities by bursting petroleum product pipelines in order to make ill-gotten money.

He urged all Nigerians to realise that optimal security of lives and properties could only be achieved when they individually and collectively obey the laws of the land and refrain from criminal activities.

He expressed the Federal Government's sympathy to the families of those who lost their loved ones in Tuesday's pipeline fire and urged the family heads to always control their wards to be law-abiding as "ignorance of the law cannot be an excuse," assuring Nigerians of the Federal government's resolve to eradicate similar incidents.

The Group General Manager, Public Affairs of NNPC, Mr. Levi Ajunoma, described the incident as unfortunate.

He told THISDAY in an interview, "We regret the loss of lives and we have several times that insisted vandalism is a dangerous practice and anybody who is engaging in this practice should desist from it.

"Any one who is involved in this act is endangering himself and the nation. We are really bitter about the loss of lives and we are using this opportunity to appeal to communities that live near the NNPC pipeline to give the right of way, to please cooperate with the corporation. And for those communities that have shown cooperation up to this point, we also want to say we are grateful."

According to him, "Some warlords and rich people in the society are behind this thing. They are warlords and not villagers. Poor men cannot afford the cost of the number of plastic gallons at the scene of the incident. They planned this thing in advance before buying this number of containers. They know they will carry out such operation."

He maintained that the villagers became the scape goats because they did not know the consequences of scooping fuel.

According to him, "The proper thing is for the villagers to report such incidents to the NNPC and security agents.

Giving an insight into the corporation's loss in the past years to vandalism, he said the NNPC suffered about 971 cases of pipeline vandalism in 2004, 2,258 in 2005 and 2,912 cases in 2006 with a substantial number this year.

Since the Jesse pipeline fire incident of October 1998 in which over 1,000 people were burnt to death, the country has been treated to a macabre dance of death orchestrated by vandals.

Oil explosions are frequent in Nigeria, Africa's biggest producer of crude, in part because of poor pipeline maintenance and the activities of thieves who vandalise pipelines to siphon off petrol and sell it on the black market.

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