

# PETROLEUM IN NIGERIA 2001

## 1. OIL BLAZE KILLS 50

A fuel pipeline blaze has killed more than 50 people in a fishing village near the Nigerian city of Lagos.

Some of the victims, including children, were caught in billowing flames as they were scooping up petrol from the leaking pipeline. An explosion ripped through the fractured pipeline near Ebute-Okò, a fishing village opposite the central business district of Lagos across a lagoon.

Nearby huts and wooden houses were engulfed by the fire. Many of the dead were reported to be fishermen burned alive in their dugout canoes.

### Pipeline tragedies

Injured people were evacuated from the area by boat as firefighters struggled to contain the blaze. Villagers said the pipeline, operated by the state-run Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), had been leaking for nearly two months.

The incident is just the latest in a string of oil pipeline tragedies that have hit Nigeria in the past two years. "There are dozens of bodies, more than 50," said Marine Police Officer Edward Agwale.

The cause of the blaze is not known, but a spokesman for the state oil company blamed it on the activities of people he described as fuel thieves.

Witnesses quoted by Reuters news agency said the fire was ignited by a wood stove where a woman was cooking in the open. The pipeline lies near Atlas Cove, the main loading centre for fuel imported into Nigeria.

### Oil thefts

Some oil leaks are caused by poor maintenance, but others occur after pipelines are deliberately punctured and the leaking fuel is siphoned off. There is a thriving black market in fuel.

Nigeria is Africa's top oil exporter, but often faces shortages of refined products. Many of Nigeria's pipeline fires have been in the Niger Delta region, which accounts for most of Nigeria's crude production of over two million barrels a day.

In July, at least 250 people died when fuel exploded at a pipeline near Warri

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**Source:** RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 12 –January 2001

## 2. CHILDREN DIE AFTER PLAYING IN OIL; TOXIC CHEMICAL SUSPECTED

LAGOS, Dec 8 (AFP) - Eight children and a woman have died after contact with an oil slick off the coast of Nigeria, possibly due to toxic chemicals in the oil, officials said Friday.

Some of the children had apparently been playing in the oil, which washed up on a beach near the settlement of Akassa, in Bayelsa State, on December 1 and 2.

A local official in the area said the main oil company operating in there was Texaco, a US firm. Mike Weeks, the coordinator of environmental group Pro-Natura International, earlier told that nine people from two villages, eight of them children and one woman, had died, apparently after coming into contact with the slick, he said.

Oil industry experts Friday declined to comment publicly on the incident but suggested the slick might have contained toxic chemicals or chemicals used for cleaning out oil tanks.

Forensic tests were being carried out at a laboratory in Port Harcourt on traces of the slick washed ashore at the villages, Weeks said. A spokesman for Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamiye seigha told Texaco was the only major operator in the area where the oil slick was reported last week. "We cannot be certain for now, but it seems most likely it was from Texaco," the spokesman said by telephone from the state capital, Yenagoa.

Two oil companies, US group Texaco and a Nigerian group called Consolidated, operate in the area from which the slick appeared to have come, the Bayelsa spokesman said, adding no-one could say for now who was responsible.

Pro-Natura runs a major development and environmental development project at Akassa and Weeks said its workers there had confirmed nine deaths but said locals reported more had since died. He said a first group of five children died on December 1 when they came into contact the slick as they were playing in the shallow waters off the beach, Weeks said.

The group started vomiting within minutes and died as they tried to return to their village, he said. Another three children and a woman in a neighbouring village died the next day also after contact with the slick, he added.

A report in the newspaper This Day Friday said its correspondent had seen dead fish floating in the water and lizards lying dead on the beach. As well as being populated by people, the area is considered an area of great natural beauty and environmental importance with a large population of rare turtles.

A spokesman for Texaco's Nigerian arm, Texaco Overseas Petroleum Company, was unavailable for comment on Friday.

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**Source:** *RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 12 –January 2001*