



**ATOMIC JUNCTION EXPLOSION CAN BE THE LAST OF HUMAN ERRORS IN THE
DOWNSTREAM PETROLEUM SECTOR IF THE SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS ARE DEALT WITH.**

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The avoidable tragedy of October 7 is not the first, the second or the third of its kind, but one of many that has once again claimed lives and injured the health of many taxpayers, destroyed businesses so unrelated to the sale or distributions of petroleum products, temporarily displaced people from their homes, left people with noticeable blemishes, and denied the economy some contribution to growth. Sadly, almost every Ghanaian will be conscious about the incident and give it some two or so weeks' attention, and nothing more: the scene will be toured by government officials, the injured will be visited in the hospital, the dead will be buried by the state, the government will promise to investigate and find a solution to the problem, and then nothing happens afterwards.

ACEP wants to see a shift from the government's business-as-usual responses to a comprehensive action that deals with a system that enables the unfortunate to continue to occur. The failure of institutions who have the mandate to check, monitor, and sanction the distribution of petroleum products in the downstream sector is responsible for these accidents.

The minimum requirements for a gas station to be built and sustainably operate are a license from the National Petroleum Authority (NPA), an environmental permit from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), fire certificate from the Fire Service, and a building permit from the Town and Country Planning authority as well as Local Government. These authorities have a duty of care to ensure that the safety of Ghanaians is paramount in the siting and operation of these highly flammable petroleum product stations by ensuring that business owners adhere to zoning regulations, and health and safety standards to protect lives and properties. Unfortunately, the duty of care is taken for granted as a number of these high risk businesses are licensed to operate right at heart congested public areas, and sanctions are rarely activated to ensure compliance.

The Atomic Junction explosion happened at a location where the local authority takes taxes every day from trotro and taxi drivers in the makeshift lorry station which sits in the middle of three petroleum products filling stations. At the same enclave are food vendors whose daily operations involve public exposure to naked fire. What's worse is that the technical, structural, and environmental integrity of the exploded gas installation was weak, pointing without doubt to the inefficiencies of the authorizing bodies. Unfortunately, these authorities who fail to do their work are oftentimes the very ones that congregate as the extracted few to find the solution to the problems they initiate.

To adequately and effectively deal with the recurrent explosion of petroleum products service station, there are systemic challenges that need broader consultation for a swift, independent



and comprehensive solution. ACEP therefore recommends the following for the short and long term:

1. Immediate technical audit must be conducted on all petroleum products service stations.

The assurance of the structural integrity of all service points across the country is urgently needed. This is important to ensure that another explosion is not in the loom. Consequently, an independent technical audit must be conducted on all stations to ensure that those found not to be compliant with safety standards are closed, and their further existence carefully assessed.

2. An Independent consulting firm must undertake forensic examination of the regulatory regime.

The government should end the usual approach of prescription from the same institutions that have failed to deliver on their job, for which reason explosions have sequentially occurred over the years. Ghana needs to find a fix for the institutional weaknesses that endanger citizens' lives by commissioning an independent examination of the regulatory regime for an objective solution thereto.

3. Stiffer sanctions must apply to owners of petroleum products stations who violate safety standards.

Owners of petroleum products stations must know that they have a responsibility to train their staff on health and safety, ensure structural integrity of their installations, and ensure that everything humanly possible is done to prevent leakages and explosions. This prevents a policy decision that bundles undisciplined business owners with the disciplined ones for sanction. Product stations that fail to comply with safety standards must be made to compensate all affected persons and have their licenses revoked to incentivize compliance within the industry. The sanctions must include possible incarceration of the owners of the service stations if negligence can be attributed to them.

4. Public education must be strengthened.

Many citizens die annually from gas explosions as a result of poor observance of basic safety rules, which may even be a bigger problem than what gets national attention. There is the need for public education on what activities can be carried out around petroleum products service stations. In the same vein, persons who continue to operate in restricted areas despite warnings from authorities must be forcibly removed and dealt with.

Signed
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