

South Africa mourns tanker blast victims, death toll rises to 34

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Bodies lay covered at the scene where a gas tanker exploded under a bridge in Boksburg, east of Johannesburg, December 24, 2022 [File: Hein Kaiser/AP Photo]

Pretoria, December 30 (RHC)-- Families and friends of victims of a gas tanker explosion in Johannesburg on Christmas Eve gathered on Friday morning for a memorial service, even as the death toll increased to 34 from an earlier estimate of 27, the provincial health department said. Health Minister Joe Phaahla joined relatives of the victims to pay their respects by lighting candles at the Boksburg Civic Centre.

The blast tore the roof off the emergency department at the Tambo Memorial hospital in the city's Boksburg suburb on Saturday. Many bystanders were also injured, while it destroyed houses and several cars.

The latest casualty numbers were announced in a statement on Friday by a spokesperson for the Gauteng Department of Health. "The Department of Health can confirm that the death toll from Boksburg Explosion incident has risen to 34 as of Friday, 30 December 2022," it said.

The victims included 11 health workers and 23 members of the public, the spokesperson said, adding that the numbers were constantly being updated. The severe nature of the burns inflicted by the blast was expected to result in an increase in the number of deaths, authorities had earlier said. The victims included children as young as nine, according to a message shared by the health department on social media commemorating a memorial for the victims.

Meanwhile, President Cyril Ramaphosa promised relief to the victims and said authorities were investigating the incident.

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