

Boksburg blast: NPA drops case against gas tanker driver

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) stated on 28 December 2022 that there is no case against the driver in the fatal tank blast explosion that took place in Boksburg on Christmas Eve. He will not be appearing in court.



Source: Reuters.

This, despite family members of the deceased, members of The National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (Nehawu) and politicians gathering outside the Boksburg Magistrate Court this morning.

The 32-year old hit a low bridge causing a blast that has, to date, claimed 27 lives near the Tambo Memorial Hospital. Of these, nine were hospital staff members.

Innovative Staffing Solutions (ISS), an operational outsourcing services provider which permanently employs the truck driver, this morning confirmed that the South African Police Services (SAPS) has released the driver of the truck, due to insufficient evidence that the driver was negligent or at fault.

"Following urgent investigations, Innovative Staffing Solutions can confirm that the driver was not negligent and did everything in his power to alert people to the dangers of the situation," said ISS managing director, Arnoux Maré.

Maré said she understood how difficult this time is for the family of the deceased and injured, and that they require answers as to what caused the blast. Hence she made the decision made to release the details of their internal investigation in the

form of a timeline of events leading to the fateful event.

- On 24 December 2022, the driver was en-route from Richards Bay to Botswana.
- After over-nighting for approximately 10 hours at an approved truck stop, the driver took the wrong exit to get onto the N17 highway. He immediately tried to correct himself to get back en-route.
- The exit unfortunately directed him under the bridge.
- The bridge height restriction boards were illegible.
- As an experienced and responsible driver, he first stopped the vehicle to establish if the truck and trailer would fit under the bridge before he drove through carefully.
- When he was comfortable that the truck and trailer would make it under the bridge, he proceeded with caution.
- However, the driver did not realise that the incline at the bottom of the bridge would raise the back of the trailer.
- At approximately 06:15, the truck got stuck under the bridge, which caused the gas tanker to sustain damage which released liquified petroleum gas.
- When he heard a metal scraping sound, he immediately stopped the vehicle and jumped out. He first checked the front of the vehicle and could not detect any damage.
- When he inspected the back of the vehicle, he noticed that the tanker's cap had been scraped off.



11 Tambo Memorial Hospital staff among the dead in tanker blast

Bhargav Acharya 28 Dec 2022



- He immediately called his ISS controller and informed them of the incident.
- The driver then called the fire department himself and alerted them of the incident and the gas leak.
- He immediately took the necessary action to cordon off the scene and to warn the public, motorists, and passer-by traffic to immediately leave the area.
- He managed to stop three vehicles, but others drove through his barricade and would not heed his warnings.
- A security vehicle stopped and helped him to put up safety tape behind the truck, while the driver ran to put up the safety tape ahead of the vehicle.
- When he realised that the security vehicle had not displayed the tape far enough from the back of the truck, he ran and pulled it off and moved it a couple of hundred meters further to keep people away from the scene.
- The driver kept shouting at people to leave the scene and even tried to physically move the gathering crowds out of the way.
- Two women witnessed his attempts and also tried to assist him. One also provided statements accordingly.
- Approximately 30 minutes after the truck got stuck, it ignited.
- The driver was eventually overcome by gas inhalation and lost consciousness. An ambulance collected him and drove him away before the truck exploded approximately 30 minutes later, claiming the lives of people.

Innovative Staffing Solutions says it handed its investigation findings over to the authorities.

"He [the driver] demonstrated the utmost level of care and professionalism, and we thank him for his conscientious actions which potentially saved the lives of countless other people.

"We are deeply saddened by this horrific and tragic event that claimed the lives of people and left several people injured. Our deepest condolences and prayers to the families who lost loved ones," said Maré.

The owners of the specific liquified petroleum gas tanker, Infinite Group, did not release a statement.

Over 30 people are being treated for critical wounds at various hospitals.

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