

Introduction

According to natives of Gbarantoru community in Bayelsa State of Nigeria, Shell ignited a gas flare furnace at about mid-night on 25th October, 2009. Due to the seriousness of the act by Shell, ERA made a follow up visit on November 5, 2009 to ascertain the current situation.

AT GBARANTORU

The first port of call when the ERA led team arrived Gbarantoru environment was to visit Shell's facility, from where the gas was flared to see and hear from Shell's Official [Engineers] on site. On arrival at the facility the team was informed that the Officers in charge of the facility just left the site. We noticed that the gas flare has been put off.

Because the flare was off we were able to get close to the flare point and observed that Shell had prepared a stack for the flaring of gas, in its usual horizontal manner - on the ground.

ERA interviewed a number of men, women and children at the site. Community people expressed how apprehensive they were at the sudden ignition of the gas flare in their backyard. They spoke about their fears in relation to their health, environment and bodies of natural water.

According to Mrs. Evelyn W, Ogbara,

Our house is the closest to the gas flare site. When my children woke up at about 3 - 4 AM that night, they rushed to me crying that the air is polluted and they are having problem with breathing. I woke up immediately and observed that the whole house was covered with strange substance. There was smoke everywhere. That was the night the furnace was lit, on the 25th October 2009. Considering the danger posed by the situation, I took my children very early in the morning to Yenagoa. I also went and reported the matter to the State government Department in charge of Gas and Pollution. They also visited the community that day. Apart from that I also reported the matter to my lawyer. Since that day, my children and I have not slept in this house, we have been sleeping from the home of one relation to the other in Yenagoa. In fact we are like refugees in our own land. The matter is a serious one and we want Shell to relocate this gas flare from here

OBSERVATIONS

At the time of our visit the flare site was calm, with just one Mobile Police Officer at the security post and a few workers lounging about. The site was fenced round with wire, allowing people to see through the premises. Some crops in nearby farms were burnt and some had wilted leaves.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION;

Community people are happy that the gas flare has been put off. However they still express some fear that Shell might put it on again anytime soon. They believed that Shell was test running the facility and may soon commence a full-fledged flaring in the community as the company has done elsewhere over the years.

We recommend that

1. Shell should keep the gas flare at Gbarantoru switched off.
2. The Federal and State governments should listen to the demands of the Gbarantoru people and prevail on Shell to respect the people's right to life in a safe environment
3. All stakeholders, the media and Environmental/Human Rights groups should rise up and demand for the respect of the environmental rights of the people
4. The people of Gbarantoru should remain resolute and united in this just cause to save their lives and environment