

Safety concerns prompt walkout

- **Chalpat Sonti**
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Workers at Burrup Fertilisers' ammonia plant have walked off the job over safety fears.

About 80 maintenance crew members, or about half those employed at the site, downed tools at the plant near Karratha this morning after a fellow worker was injured on the job yesterday.

Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union state secretary Kevin Reynolds said the man was repairing a valve on a pipe which was supposed to be free of gas, but when he cut through the pipe it still contained some.

The man was taken to hospital for treatment after inhaling ammonia vapour.

Mr Reynolds said it was the latest in a "series of accidents" at the plant recently.

"They've had numerous concerns about safety issues but were getting nowhere raising it with the company so they walked off the job," he said.

The union then contacted Worksafe, whose inspectors visited the plant this morning.

A Worksafe spokeswoman said workers had raised three areas of concern, which were being discussed with company management this afternoon.

These were that people were straying from areas they had permission to go in, workers were being asked to lift objects that they believed to be too heavy, and that staff wanted mesh covers put in place to protect them from falling objects.

The inspectors, as was standard procedure, would ask Burrup what it would do about the issues, and if the answers were not satisfactory it could take enforcement action.

She said the incident yesterday had not been raised by workers, but by the union.

Mr Reynolds said the workers' safety representative was not allowed in on the inspection tour.

"The company is showing people around but are not going to show them what the issues are for workers," he said.

He said workers had complained the company was not following proper procedure when there were gas leaks. It did not sound warning sirens to warn other staff, which also triggered a Worksafe incident report.

The workers would stay off the job until Worksafe filed a report and the company addressed their concerns, Mr Reynolds said.

Burrup managing director Pankaj Oswal said the Worksafe inspection confirmed the plant was "completely safe".

Maintenance work and training were the only activities being carried out at the plant at present due to the Varanus incident. The maintenance program was about half-complete.

Burrup , which is majority-owned by Mr Oswal, has been badly affected by the gas explosion at Apache Energy's Varanus Island plant.

The Burrup plant produces about four per cent of the world's ammonia and is about to list on the Australian Securities Exchange.