

Man hurt in gas leak 'extremely lucky not to die'

50 quit at Burrup

By COURTNEY BERTLING

MORE than 50 workers have quit their jobs at Burrup Fertilisers after a worker was injured in an incident last week.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) claims there was an explosion after two welders ruptured a pipe at the plant, causing a gas leak which resulted in a man being taken to hospital after inhaling ammonia gas.

CFMEU State secretary Kevin Reynolds said he had reports from workers of many serious concerns regarding Burrup Fertilisers.

"I understand the injured man was told there was no gas in the pipe but when he started working on it, the pipe blew out 600C gas so fast that it could cut through metal," Mr Reynolds said.

"He is extremely lucky he did not die."

Mr Reynolds said Worksafe was contacted to investigate the plant after the incident and a series of other safety concerns.

"Many problems had been found which led to more than 50 workers refusing to go to work,"

Mr Reynolds said.

One of the men who walked out of the plant last week, Matthew Hicky, was critical of the way the company dealt with the issues and workers. "They told us we had two options, get back to work or leave," he said.

"After the explosion at Varanus Island, everything was rushed. We had no safety gear, we were wearing triple X gear with ropes to hold our pants up.

"The conditions of the plant are very bad. I'm really surprised that no-one has died.

"Both the union and Worksafe found things wrong with the plant."

Worksafe WA commissioner Nina Lyhne said that it had not been the first time Worksafe had to make an inspection of the plant.

"Many issues were brought to us, including falling objects," she said.

"But it has been dealt with and they were given an improvement notice. We do this to make sure the companies involved can work at the best of their abilities."

Burrup Fertilisers managing director Pankaj Oswal said after the gas explosion at Varanus

Island, the company brought forward a planned maintenance shutdown originally scheduled for July.

"We have now finished the maintenance program, but during the shutdown we had minimal amounts of gas running through the system to maintain cooling," he said.

"Worksafe have carried out a full inspection of the plant, at our invitation, and have confirmed it is completely safe."

Mr Oswal said the plant could not be put back into operation until adequate gas supplies were available.

In the meantime, the company had drawn up a program of training and general maintenance work to be carried out by its permanent staff.

"We're making the best of a bad situation," he said.

"When the gas is finally switched on again, our plan is to have the plant in 'as new' condition and our people ready to hit the ground running.

"Our aim is to make up lost production as quickly as possible consistent with safe operation of the plant."

Pipe a disaster waiting to happen: worker



THE section of pipe believed responsible for WA's gas crisis was corroded down "to the thickness of a match stick". That's the claim from a worker who supplied the *Pilbara News*

with this picture, believed to show the source of the explosion at Apache Energy's Varanus Island plant which has crippled industry. Continued Page 3