

# Fertilisers furore

By Jodi Monaghan

A DESPERATE Burrup Fertilisers employee has outlined serious safety concerns at the trouble-plagued plant in a tell-all letter.

The whistleblower, who wants to remain anonymous, pleaded with government authorities to step in and take action against the site's 'dangerous working conditions'.

The letter, obtained by the *Pilbara News*, warned of a possible major disaster with the potential to affect the entire community unless mandatory safety requirements were enforced.

"I myself, and most other operations personnel, have grave concerns that someone will be seriously injured or killed in my workplace unless some prompt action is taken," the worker said.

"We have had an escalating number of incidents that could have resulted in serious injury or death recently and I along with a lot of others now dread, fear going to work."

The letter was sent to Member for North West Coastal Fred Riebeling, WorkSafe, Fire and Emergency Services Authority, Department of Industry and Resources and the Department of Environment.

Mr Riebeling said allegations in the letter were alarming and that he had

passed them on to 'relevant government departments for action'.

WorkSafe director Bjorn Gillgren confirmed his department had visited the site to investigate the letter's claims.

"Site experts have carried out a routine inspection and some of the concerns in the letter were substantiated while others were not," he said.

Mr Gillgren would not elaborate on the findings of the inspection.

But he said it was a major hazard facility and there was potential for an accident.

"WorkSafe would not award an operating licence if it wasn't safe," he said.

Meanwhile, Burrup Fertilisers is keen to finally put to rest community concerns over the plant when production begins later this month.

Company spokesman Wolfgang Jovanovic said continued rumours and innuendo about the plant's safety record were unfounded.

"I have confidence in the integrity and safety of the plant," he said.

"It has been subject to numerous audits from external authorities and has received an operating licence for full production following these audits."

Mr Jovanovic gave a personal guarantee to the plant's employees that safety at the site was paramount.

He said throughout construction of the plant the company had used 'proven, safe and reliable worldwide suppliers'.

He rejected the letter, saying the source could not be verified as an employee and that some claims were 'blatantly inaccurate'.

The letter detailed more than 20 specific areas of concern including illegal waste dumping, poor training for hazardous jobs such as confined space and working at heights, and lack of incident follow-up procedures.

The worker warned the situation was getting worse as time and commissioning progressed.

"We are now getting ready to bring seed ammonia and liquid chlorine on site and we are extremely concerned for our safety," the worker said.

"Having a water, plant air or nitrogen system failure is unfortunate but not a critical safety issue – having failures on ammonia or chlorine systems often result in fatalities."

Mr Gillgren said the purpose of commissioning the plant was to identify problems such as leaks and was 'normal operating procedure'.

"We found small problems during our site inspection but they certainly weren't show-stoppers."