

Burrup aMDEA leak report made public under FOI

Conservation groups outraged over secrecy

CONSERVATION groups have turned up the heat on Burrup Fertilisers following the public release of a solvent spill report last week.

The Conservation Council requested the environmental incident report be made public under freedom of information laws and spoke out against the company after the size and scale of the activated methyl diethanolamine spill on May 26 was revealed.

The report showed the spill footprint covered almost the entire plant and was blamed on a combination of operator error and equipment failure.

A large quantity of process gas and aMDEA gas was released into the atmosphere, spilled onto the ground and leached into the underground drainage systems and nearby sedimentation basin.

About 78,600 litres of liquid aMDEA was lost from the system during the incident.

Internal investigations by Burrup Fertilisers revealed contaminated water containing up to 0.8 per cent aMDEA leached into King Bay.

The report showed that aMDEA

was toxic to marine organisms at 1000mg/l and humans could sensitise with exposure.

But Conservation Council spokesman Chris Tallentire said inhalation, skin and eye exposure could cause acute effects including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscular weakness, ataxia, seizures and coma.

Central nervous system effects had also been reported and the solvent was highly irritating to skin and eyes.

Chronic effects included sensitisation via repeated skin contact with liver and kidney damage noted in experimental animals.

Mr Tallentire said he had received a number of reports from concerned members of the Dampier and Karratha communities over the May 26 spill.

"We believe the company should be as transparent as possible about any unauthorized discharges," Mr Tallentire said.

"The public should not be forced to use FOI to gain information about such events.

"The company should be transparently piecing info together, so that it can fully inform the commu-

nity and thereby allay community concerns."

Burrup Fertilisers took immediate remedial action to remove the aMDEA that had leaked from the Western Sedimentation Basin onto neighbouring salt flats.

National Trust spokesman Robin Chapple spoke to the Pilbara News after he received the report from the Conservation Council.

"Quite obviously there has been more going on that we knew about," Mr Chapple said.

"The aMDEA release was significant and my understanding is that the equipment wasn't correctly setup."

Mr Chapple planned to raise more questions in Parliament through Greens MLC Giz Watson.

"This is a pretty awesome, toxic substance," Mr Chapple said.

"As you can see by the footprint of the spill it was quite extensive over the plant.

"From my understanding it is an airborne pollution which is heavy and drops."

Burrup Fertilisers could not be contacted for comment.