

# Burrup Holdings rejects explosion claims

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Burrup Holdings has described stories of an explosion at its ammonium nitrate plant as 'mischievous'.

Rumours of an explosion circulated after two welders ruptured a pipe at the plant yesterday causing a gas leak.

One of the men was taken to hospital after inhaling ammonia gas.

Fifty workers walked off the job today over the incident and other safety concerns at the site.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union is believed to have called in Worksafe to investigate the incident and a series of other safety concerns it has at the plant.

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 are roughly halfway through the maintenance program, which is on track in every respect," he said.

"We have minimal amounts of gas running through the system to maintain cooling, and a recent shipment of liquefied ammonia has virtually emptied our storage tanks," Mr Oswal said.

"We are concerned at mischievous rumours of an explosion at the plant during the shutdown, which is certainly not the case.

"We have no idea who is circulating the rumours, but it is clearly an individual or group that has no concern for the feelings of the local community, who are being caused unnecessary anxiety.

"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. 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," he said.

JAYNE RICKARD