

New safety concerns hit Burrup fertiliser plant

KATIE HAMPSON

The Burrup fertiliser plant owned by millionaire Perth couple Pankaj and Radhika Oswal was hit by a raft of new problems yesterday, with managers locked in talks with union officials over fresh safety concerns.

It comes after Burrup Fertilisers was forced to scale back production because of the State's gas shortage and its \$2.5 billion float was postponed until the profit impact of the gas crisis could be established.

Amid rumours of another disastrous gas explosion in the State's North-West yesterday, it emerged two metal workers on separate occasions had ruptured pipes at the plant this week causing minor gas leaks.

Kevin Reynolds, secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, said 50 workers walked off the job yesterday over safety concerns while union and WorkSafe officials performed safety checks at the site.

He said tempers started to flare after a

number of metal workers were told on Monday their contracts at the site had been terminated without explanation.

He was also scathing of safety conditions at the plant and claimed WorkSafe had issued improvement notices.

Mr Reynolds claimed that the company had said to the men that they either worked in there as directed "or we'll finish you up".

"So the 50 men said they'd prefer to lose the job than work in those conditions," he said.

Managing director Pankaj Oswal said claims of a gas explosion were nonsense and the site was safe. He said after the gas explosion at Varanus Island the company had brought forward a planned maintenance shutdown, originally scheduled for July.

"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, he said.