

# Safety concerns

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## FULL TEXT

Four explosions in a year at plant

Workers and their representatives are speaking out after four explosions rocked the Shoalhaven Starches plant at Bomaderry since July last year.

The most recent explosion occurred on Sunday, April 7, and some workers believe it is only a matter of time before a colleague is injured or worse.

Sitting on the banks of the Shoalhaven River, the Shoalhaven Starches plant, owned by Manildra Group, is the largest wheat starch and gluten plant of its kind in the world and employs hundreds of workers.

On July 16, 2023, nearby residents were reminded of the presence of the facility, when an explosion occurred around 11pm that night.

The explosion was heard and felt by nearby residents, with local member Gareth Ward, who lives in Bomaderry, issuing a statement the next morning.

"Like many locals, I heard the explosion from my home," he said.

"I am advised that SafeWork NSW is investigating this matter, and I commend the company for placing its primary focus on the safety and wellbeing of its staff."

The explosion occurred in gluten dryer 8, which was installed only a month prior, and the same gluten dryer would be the scene of another three explosions.

A worker at the plant, who spoke to ACM anonymously due to not being permitted to speak publicly, said that both they and their colleagues were concerned for their safety.

"If the company wants maintenance or work done in [the gluten dryer], we ask them to shut it down completely because at the end of the day, we want to go home to our families."

Normally, the worker said, when maintenance is done on a gluten dryer it can continue operating and it is only when workers need to go into a designated explosion zone that a full shutdown is required.

However, workers are so concerned about this dryer that they are asking for a full shutdown to go anywhere near the machinery.

A spokesperson for Manildra said the company's primary concern is for the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees and the local community.

"The four incidents have occurred in Gluten Dryer 8, since its commission in June 2023," the spokesperson said.

"In all these incidents, emergency protocols were enacted immediately, and no employees were injured. All on-site health and safety equipment has performed to industry standards."

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## DETAILS

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