

Manildra workers hold fears after four explosions

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FULL TEXT

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 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 the Mercury anonymously due to not being permitted to speak publicly, said 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."

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

"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."

The Manildra spokesperson said following the incidents, the company implemented actions recommended by the dryer manufacturer, including significant infrastructure and modifications to mitigate future risks.

"Establishing the cause of these incidents and implementing all safety recommendations is our highest priority," the spokesperson said. "Manildra Group is currently cooperating with SafeWork NSW to establish the cause of the incident and implement all recommendations."

ETU organiser Stewart Edward who represents some of the workers employed at the plant said there were chronic problems at the site that were not fully addressed. "Someone's going to get killed."

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