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# THE AGE

## Grandmother sacked after sick leave

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### INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

GRANDMOTHER Karen Palmer was looking forward to getting back into the swing of things after several months off **work** with a shoulder **injury**.

Two operations, the most recent in March, had interrupted her work as a machine operator at a wire component factory at Coolaroo, near Broadmeadows. Then, after a brief return, a bout of laryngitis laid her off for another week. Returning to Greer Industries last Monday, the last thing she expected was to be sacked for being "a liability".

"A liability after 14 years?" she asked, incredulously. She claimed the manager told her: "You're costing the company money."

"And that was it," she said. "I'm out of a job."

"I'm 60 years of age. Who's going to hire a 60-year-old?"

Ms Palmer injured her shoulder lifting heavy boxes last year and had two operations, returning to work last month with a certificate from the company doctor saying she was fit to resume normal duties. Greer Industries employs fewer than 100 employees and is exempt from unfair dismissal laws under the new WorkChoices rules. Ms Palmer said the company put on two casual workers the same day she was sacked.

Greer general manager Steven Curry said he could not comment for confidentiality reasons.

Ms Palmer, who lives with her daughter and two grandchildren, fears she will not find another job. "I've chewed the tops of my nails off, I'm so depressed," she said. "

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union is holding a protest barbecue today outside the factory's gates. AMWU state secretary Dave Oliver said the union was lodging an unlawful termination claim with the Federal Court, claiming Ms Palmer's sacking was discriminatory.

Caption :PHOTO: Cut loose: Karen Palmer lost her job of 14 years after time off with a shoulder injury and laryngitis. PICTURE: WAYNE TAYLOR

CARTOON BY TANDBERG

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