How to Conduct a Successful Safety-Theme Campaign

IDEAS FOR COMMITMENT
Building a Commitment to Safety

Some veteran safety professionals have run more “campaigns” than lifelong politicos in Washington.

Workplace campaigns centered around safety themes have long been a staple of industrial safety programs. They pre-date OSHA’s founding in 1970 by decades. Pioneering safety programs in steel mills and the railroads in the first half of the 1900s used banners, slogans, posters, training and safety committee meetings to reinforce year-long themes: “Stay Alive in ’35;” “Keeping Score in ’24.”

The scope of campaigns

Safety campaigns can be much broader in scope than a single workplace. OSHA currently is conducting a nationwide Fall Prevention campaign, visibly promoted on its website www.osha.gov. “This website is part of OSHA’s nationwide outreach campaign to raise awareness among workers and employers about the hazards of falls from ladders, scaffolds and roofs,” states OSHA.

In Europe, the European Union-OSHA (EU-OSHA) has since 2000 run the Healthy Workplaces Campaigns, formerly known as “European Weeks for Safety and Health at Work.” EU-OSHA claims these safety campaigns, each two years in duration, are the largest in the world today. They involve hundreds of organizations from all of the EU Member States, the countries of the European Economic Area, European Union candidate and potential candidate countries. EU-OSHA makes information, practical guides and tools, and publicity material freely available, translated into more than 20 European languages.

The annual “European Week for Safety and Health at Work” (in October every year) is a particular focus for these campaigns. The week includes training sessions, conferences and workshops, posters, film and photo competitions, quizzes, suggestion schemes,
advertising campaigns and press conferences heavily promoted throughout Europe.

Other highlights: the “Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards” competition, which recognizes organizations that have found innovative ways of promoting safety and health, and the “Healthy Workplaces Closing Summits,” which bring health and safety professionals, policymakers, and employers’ and employees’ representatives together to share best practice.

Distracted driving campaign components
In the United States currently, distracted driving is one of the best-known national safety campaigns. Conducted by the U.S. Department of Transportation, it contains many elements that you can use in your workplace campaigns:

1) a theme or motto: “ONE TEXT OR CALL COULD WRECK IT ALL;”
2) a powerfully persuasive bottom line statistic: “In 2010 alone, over 3,000 people were killed in distracted driving crashes;”
3) an educational website: www.distraction.gov;
4) a mission statement: “Get the facts, get involved, and help us keep America’s roadways safe;”
5) a definition of the targeted hazard, using examples: types of distractions include texting, using a cell phone or smartphone, eating and drinking, talking to passengers, grooming, reading maps, and adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player;
6) summit meetings involving senior leadership;
7) a litany of awareness-raising facts: text messaging creates a crash risk 23 times worse than driving while not distracted; drivers who use hand-held devices are 4 times more likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves; driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by 37%; and 40% of all American teens say they have been in a car when the driver used a cell phone in a way that put people in danger; and
8) educational Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding distracted driving.

Before you roll out…
Preparation and careful study is absolutely essential for your successful safety campaign. Before you roll it out, a number of decisions must be reached:

What is your campaign’s budget? Campaigns do not need to be lengthy, costly, or complicated. Here are some simple ways your business can get involved in “Safe Work Week” campaigns: Place posters in workplaces to raise awareness of safety; update work health and safety procedures; provide refresher safety training; hold a safety-themed BBQ or wellness fair and distribute relevant information.

What is your campaign’s specific focus? What hazards or injury types or practices are you targeting? Simply saying you want to raise general safety awareness is too vague, unless your workplace is in the early stage of developing its first safety program.

You want to give the entire organization a sense of mission: “We must put an end to this carnage. We must get to Zero” is the campaign mission statement of the Ontario Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB).

Your mission statement should be short and pithy for promotion on banners, signs, posters, placards, etc. But be ready to elaborate to engage your workers: “We need to eliminate workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities by building a culture of health and safety in every Ontario workplace. We need to eliminate the belief that accidents just happen,” the WSIB states.

Two other popular ways to engage workers: Have them sign a safety pledge in a public event, or a safety agreement. For instance, a parent-teen driving agreement outlines the teen’s behavioral do’s and don’t’s, responsibilities, restrictions and penalties for agreement violations. Parents sign off on promising to be “excellent” driving role models.

Define the outcomes of the campaign you desire. Results should be measurable to gauge success or failure. “Every workplace is to be a model of occupational safety & health. We want all
Ontarians to participate in this journey on the Road to Zero,” is the WSIB endgame. But is this outcome measureable? It sounds more rhetorical than something that can be evidence-based.

Every campaign needs a title or name. Think about it. This is always the case with presidential campaigns. “Tip a canoe and Tyler too.” “It’s Time for a Change.” “Sweep ‘em out.” The Ontario WSIB motto: “The Road to Zero.”

State the values that drive your safety campaign: “We believe everyone from the part-time student to the CEO needs to take person responsibility for keeping themselves and their workplaces health and safe. When you are educated, all injuries are preventable. There really are no accidents,” states the WSIB.

What will be the duration of the campaign? Attention and continuing awareness will be a problem if the campaign is too short or too long.

What tone do you want for the campaign? Do you want a hard-hitting campaign with provocative videos and visuals that are graphic, disturbing, perhaps even shocking, and difficult to watch? A campaign in Canada called “Prevent It” had this to say: “We’re not afraid to be controversial. This is not a feel-good campaign. We’ll feel good when the number of injuries and fatalities go down.”

Alternatively, you can run campaigns that rely heavily on fun and games. Simulate TV game shows. Fun runs, relay races, trivia contests, scavenger hunts, role-playing skits and debates. Display safety posters drawn by workers’ children. Hold art exhibitions. Have “town hall” type meetings where your executives listen to workers’ safety concerns and answer questions.

Determine your campaign content. Of course every campaign has a beginning and an end, a kick-off event and a close ceremony. In between, any number of activities can be held:

- fire drills, food handling courses, handwashing demonstrations, breakfasts and barbecues, health screenings, guest speakers, employee suggestion schemes, and community awareness events.

Choose your campaign partners. Collaboration with outside experts adds credibility to your campaign. Expose your workforce to talks and demonstrations by the local fire department, police, emergency medical services, hospital nurses and physicians, civil defense and disaster planners, emergency management teams and responders, and safety and health subject matter experts.

Other potential partners: community civic organizations, local trade associations and business and labor councils, grassroots groups, schools (to involve children of workers), churches, local YMCAs (for wellness and health promotion activities), and your PPE vendors or other safety equipment vendors, trainers, and consultants.

Choose your media platforms. Company newsletters are a staple. You might want to customize newsletters for your campaign topic.

- Post safety bulletins in high-visibility areas. Break rooms, lobbies and dining facilities are high-traffic places to display safety messages.
- Choose bright, eye-catching posters to spark discussions. Sponsoring an annual safety poster design and caption contest will ensure ongoing access to creative material.

Send out company-wide emails. Track open rates to help measure interest.

Create a “micro” website especially for the campaign, or dedicate part of your company’s intranet site to the campaign.

Social media – tweeting, FaceBook posts, YouTube videos – are increasingly popular and ways to have your campaign “go viral.”

Podcasts and webinars are good educational tools, and you can track and measure downloads and attendance.

Choose your timing. Make sure your safety campaign does not conflict with other organizational “volunteer drives” or initiatives. You don’t want your campaign launched while workers are distracted by building renovations, department relocations, major ergonomic installations, or safety consulting implementations. Make sure you have the best available “window of opportunity.”

Every campaign, in politics or out, has “advance” people. Be sure to prep your organization for the campaign to come. Get people thinking about it in advance. Workers will be caught off-guard and less likely to “buy in” to a campaign that is suddenly announced over the PA system one morning.

Launch time

Your research and homework completed, when you launch your campaign it’s time, as in every political campaign, to get out and drum up votes. In your case, you are aiming to get your workers to “vote” yes for safety.

Don’t be a one-man or one-woman campaign. Did you ever hear of a politician running a campaign by herself or himself? Under-staffed campaigns are almost sure-fire losers. You need “boots on the ground.” Volunteers to spread the message, model the vision, talk one on one and in small groups, tailgate meetings, in the cafeteria.

During safety campaigns, you are in effect lobbying for safety and health, advocating for safety and health. You are looking to enlist energetic, outgoing, extroverts who can be what author Malcolm Gladwell in his book “The Tipping Point” describes as salespeople, mavens (experts in safety and health) and connectors (good networkers).

Your boss must be an active campaigner. Imagine a presidential campaign if the candidate never left headquarters. Here is what the WSIB said about leadership campaigning:

“Our chairman… has traveled around Ontario meeting thousands of Ontarians and talking with them about how we can eliminate all
workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. He has talked to workers and labor leaders about the need to follow their training and use their safety equipment properly. He has talked to employers and industry leaders about the importance of making a ‘top down’ commitment to implementing and maintaining a stellar safety program. He has talked to all workplace parties about working together to identify and eliminate workplace hazards."

Build the business case for your campaign. It may be necessary in order to get your senior leaders actively involved. Ontario’s WSIB used this argument: Workplace injuries are not only dangerous; they’re expensive. The average compensation cost of a claim for 2010 is estimated at more than $19,000.

But the associated costs for a workplace injury could total three to 10 times that amount. These include: lost productivity and revenue; surcharges and lost revenues; regulatory fines. Be careful, and be prepared to document these indirect costs. Many execs are skeptical.

There are also emotional and financial costs to the worker: pain and suffering; income reduction and an uncertain future; impact on their families, friends and the community.

Recognition is a powerful motivator to get your workforce to “buy into” the campaign. Use awards, contests and competitions focusing on things like safety suggestions, safety solutions, close call reporting, hazardous conditions reporting.

Keep score. Scoreboards placed throughout your workplace are powerful reminders and motivators to keep your safety campaign “top of mind” with the workforce. Ontario’s WSIB used statistics such as these: “So far this year – by November, 73 workers have died from traumatic injuries at work in Ontario.” In 2010 alone, 51 workers per day suffered from overexertion injuries while lifting, pushing or pulling; 40 workers per day slipped, tripped or fell, resulting in injuries ranging from minor sprains and multiple fractures to paralysis; and 12 workers per day were exposed to harmful substances that caused conditions like skin disorders or respiratory illnesses.

Keys to success: As in political election campaigns, your safety campaign needs:

- A central command staff to coordinate events;
- Sponsors: your senior leaders must buy in and provide budget support;
- A campaign director: one voice of ultimate authority for planning and execution decisions, usually a senior EHS pro;
- Monitoring and discipline: everyone must be on the same page, touting the same message, reading from the same script; stay on message. Undisciplined campaigns lose elections.
- Go digital: make use of emails to workers, campaign calendar of events and other info on intranet. Create a YouTube video.

A communications director: to approve graphics, videos, web sites, signage, newsletters, payroll stuffers, banners, etc.

Volunteers going door to door, or department to department or shift to shift. They are, so to speak, ringing doorbells, handing out lit, meeting face to face and in small groups, say tailgate meetings, with enthusiasm and conviction.

Tactics and strategies of advocacy and lobbying. Your safety champions, your volunteers, are in a sense lobbying for safety. As advocates for safety they need to be opportunistic, responsive, imaginative, flexible, empathic and hard working. This is the stuff of all successful public opinion, political and commercial campaigns. Safety campaigning is no different.

Case study

Here is one example of how the components of a safety campaign can come together to positively change the culture of an organization. The Tamdown Group began trading in 1977. Following a management buyout in 1999 it has become one of the United Kingdom’s leading regional civil engineering contractors, providing ground work preparation and infrastructure construction (roads, drainage, foundations and concrete frames) on some of the country’s largest brownfield development sites. The company has nearly 500 employees working on around 45 sites across the country.

As the scale of clients and work developed, Tamdown’s health and safety culture had to keep pace. The company decided to establish competitive advantage when competing for contracts. Senior leadership concluded a new safety strategy was needed.

The mission: the group health and safety manager was given the marching orders to introduce a new safety regime. The objective: give responsibility to the workforce and create a safer environment through knowledge and empowerment. The initiative title: “Worksmart,” a worker involvement initiative. “Worksmart” includes safety training for supervisors and operatives, safe maintenance of the plant, and new risk-free systems of work.

The latest phase: a daily “WISE” (Worksmart Engagement) briefing. All operatives ask themselves a crucial question: “What difference can I make to ensure that this site is a safer place to work?”

Wherever a site is operational, then WiSE is operational too, supplemented by a site safety forum which oversees and reviews the program on site.

According to the company, its “Worksmart” program has matured over time. It is now a genuine partnership between management and front-line employees, communicating about safety issues as never before.