



Healthy Workplaces

Working together for risk prevention



Summary – Benchmarking and Exchange of Good Practices in Occupational Safety and Health

Brussels, 5–6 June, 2013

The effectiveness of **working together for risk prevention** was demonstrated in the sharing of good practice at this two-day event, organised by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) and its campaign partners.

This was the first event of its kind, an initiative developed by the official campaign partners of the Healthy Workplaces Campaign 2012–13, 'Working together for risk prevention'. It grew out of a desire to put the campaign theme into practice – to provide an opportunity for EU-OSHA and its partners to meet and share good practice in occupational safety and health (OSH).

Attended by representatives from many different types of organisations, notably the Director of EU-OSHA, Christa Sedlatschek, and the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, László Andor, the event demonstrated a strong commitment to improving OSH through working together. It became very clear that such opportunities are extremely important to the campaign partners and EU-OSHA, and will certainly help to ensure the long-lasting effects of the campaign.



An outline of the event

The event opened with an inspiring speech from Christa Sedlatschek, who emphasised the importance of the campaign partners, highlighting that 'EU-OSHA does not have the ability to bring about change on the shop floor but the campaign partners do'. In fact, the idea of holding the benchmarking event was proposed by the campaign partners, who formed a steering group to develop and organise the initiative, and set the agenda and workshop topics.

Dr Sedlatschek thanked and praised the work of the campaign partners for 'rising to the challenge of awareness raising and distributing material, holding events and engaging in outreach', and went on to talk about the win-win cooperation that the partnership scheme brings.



A broad approach to benchmarking was taken for this event, and this was outlined by EU-OSHA Project Manager Dietmar Elsler in his introduction: 'occupational safety and health benchmarking is a planned process by which an organisation compares its health and safety processes and performance with others to learn how to reduce accidents and ill health, improve compliance with health and safety law and/or cut compliance costs.' Dr Elsler went on to explain that benchmarking is very beneficial for organisations: it can help organisations to gauge how well they are doing and avoid 'reinventing the wheel' by learning from others' experience. Most importantly, it can contribute to the overall aim of reducing the risks for workers.



The introduction to the event included an address from representatives of the campaign steering group, ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE and Ideal Standard. There was also a presentation by Markku Aaltonen from the Finnish Zero-Accident Forum, who described the Forum's 'Zero Accident' goal – a concept that stimulated interesting debates in the subsequent workshops. This Finnish initiative demonstrates also the positive impact of OSH benchmarking networks at workplace level.

Over the course of the two days six workshops were run with the support of the campaign partners and included topics such as 'Learning from incidents and accidents', 'Leadership training', 'Safety and health culture of an organisation', 'How to motivate and support SMEs and self-employed in OSH', 'OSH regulations and how they are applied in the construction and associated industries' and 'Indicators of OSH performance'.

The first day of the event ended with a campaign partner ceremony with EU Commissioner László Andor and EU-OSHA Director Christa Sedlatschek. The ceremony was an occasion to celebrate the good work of the campaign partners and certificates were given to all partners as recognition of their achievement. The work of the campaign

partners was again praised, this time in László Andor's address when he expressed how impressed he was by their work.

Speaking of the current economic climate, László Andor highlighted that, although it is common to hear of economic and financial constraints, 'the most important investment you have to make is investment in the human resources' – in the women and men who build the European economy. He added that what is most important for this campaign is for health and safety to be seen as a very important investment, and not as a burden.



The workshop findings

Each workshop enjoyed interesting and useful discussions about its particular area of concern. Findings from the workshops were reported back at common sessions, allowing all those present to benefit from the individual workshop discussions. In particular, each workshop's participants were asked to discuss and report back on the three main challenges in their area and what the network of campaign partners and EU-OSHA can do to support this.

A recurring challenge was one of creating a 'no blame culture', or, as Tom Schalenbourg of Toyota Material Handling Europe put it, 'The challenge is to turn blame culture into a positively responsible culture.'

A recurring request was that both EU-OSHA and the campaign partners continue to support one another at similar events in the future. Continuing to share best practice was seen as very important, along with better communication when working together, and keeping the channels of communication open.

There was a clear desire for EU-OSHA to support the dialogue between OSH professionals and to continue with benchmarking events, which provide a platform for the sharing of best practice.

The long-lasting effects of the campaign

As well as benchmarking, the event provided an opportunity for networking and learning from one another. It is anticipated that such events will continue in the long term, which will lead to the sustainability of the campaign theme of 'working together'. Such events will help put the campaign partnership on a more long-term basis, and are a process that may continue in future Healthy Workplaces Campaigns. Christa Sedlatschek also invited further input from the campaign partners, saying that EU-OSHA 'would be eager to hear campaign partners' views about future campaigns and how they can be improved'.

The benchmarking event is to be followed up at the campaign Summit, to be held on 11–12 November 2013 in Bilbao in Spain. At this event there will be a workshop dedicated to the benchmarking initiative. For now, though, the next stage in the benchmarking process is to take home what was learnt from the event and put it into practice – perhaps the hardest step of all.

To find out more about the Healthy Workplaces Campaign and what it means to become an official campaign partner, visit

www.healthy-workplaces.eu

