



Getting the Message Across: health and safety campaigning

Summary of an Agency manual

Promotional campaigns can be a very effective way to raise awareness about occupational safety and health (OSH) related issues and change people's behaviour, provided you follow a few basic guidelines. This factsheet covers the basic principles you need to bear in mind when running a publicity campaign, whether at European, national or workplace level. It is based on an Agency manual and a survey of OSH campaign specialists across Europe.



ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

Set a measurable objective

This will help you evaluate the success of your campaign. Keep your goal realistic and specific. For example: 'Generate 5,000 requests for an information pack on how to prevent injuries in the hotel and catering sector.'

Identify your target markets and audiences

Focus is critical. If you try to appeal to too broad a cross-section of people, you will waste resources and dilute your message.

- Concentrate on sectors where the OSH problem you want to highlight is most acute. For example, solvents in the print industry.
- Target the people in your chosen sectors who have the power to act on your recommendations. In many cases they will not be the individuals directly affected by the OSH issue you plan to highlight. They could be senior managers, union representatives or personnel managers, amongst many others.

Formulate a clear and simple message

People are inundated with information every day. To grab their attention, your message must be short, simple and relevant to your target audience. Try to distil it down to a jargon-free statement, ideally no longer than two sentences. One way to do this is to think in terms of 'problem and solution'.

For example:

- Research has shown that four out of 10 clerical staff suffer from RSI. New guidelines could dramatically reduce this number and the associated costs.
- Failure to comply with legislation governing asbestos exposure could cost firms €20,000 in fines and ruin employees' health. Using a new 12-point protection plan, these problems could be avoided.

A Member State campaign on safe working conditions in the agricultural sector targeted a limited number of hazards using TV, posters and leaflets. The messages were:

- Safe working means an organised workplace;
- Safe working means organised tree felling;
- Safe working means information and labelling of pesticides; and
- Safe working means a suitable tractor.

Partnerships

Working in partnership can open up new channels to promote your campaign and add credibility. Potential partners include labour inspectorates, trade unions, employers' associations, occupational health insurance organisations and preventive services. But there are many others.

PLANNING YOUR CAMPAIGN

Once you have agreed your goal, target audience and key message, it is vital to have your campaign carefully mapped out before it is launched.

Identify the most appropriate media to reach your target audiences

Most campaigns involve several media, from press releases and magazine articles to posters and direct mail shots. The precise mix will be determined by your target audience, as well as financial and time considerations. Possibilities include:

- **Press releases and articles:** Most large-scale campaigns should be initiated with a press release. Send it to named journalists at publications covering your target sector. Get your key message across in the headline and first paragraph. Keep it factual and provide a contact name and phone number.
- **Direct mail:** A good channel for reaching named individuals, especially opinion formers, such as OSH practitioners and business heads. Letters should not be longer than two pages, double-spaced. Use sub-heads, bold and italics to draw readers' eyes to the key points. Include a PS with a 'call to action'.
- **Advertisements:** Handy for reaching large numbers of people. Aim for simplicity and strong visual impact. Incorporate a response mechanism such as a tear-off coupon or phone number.
- **Posters:** Useful for raising awareness about risks and solutions amongst workers. Message should be bold and simple so people can understand it immediately as they go past the poster.
- **Leaflets:** An effective way to get across OSH good practice and specific tips on how to avoid problems. Can accompany a direct mail letter or be distributed at public events.
- **Newsletters:** Good for regular updates and for covering major or complex issues where a variety of articles are required. Vary the length of articles and keep them as short as possible.
- **Brochures and guides:** Mainly used to communicate detailed or step-by-step information and advice. Should be targeted at people responsible for OSH.
- **Exhibitions:** Valuable for getting your message across to those involved in OSH and for raising your profile amongst prospective partners.
- **Videos:** A popular tool for education and training but can be expensive.
- **Seminars, workshops and other face-to-face media:** Personal contact like this can be very effective, especially towards the end of a campaign when the key messages have already been hammered home.
- **Internet:** you can use websites not just to promote your campaign but also to get people actively involved.

Reaching women workers

Consider contacting women's magazines with an idea for a feature relating to 'typical women's work' and ill health, for example safe working with VDUs in the office or violence risks to groups such as nurses or social care workers.

Establish the 'tone' of the campaign

The tone of each campaign – its look and feel – will depend on your target audiences and the messages you want to communicate. There are essentially four routes open to you:

- **Cool and rational:** This is most suitable for high-level target audiences, such as heads of businesses and policy makers. Generally they want to hear a concise, unemotional and well-reasoned business case, supported by hard facts and figures.
- **Educational:** Most effective when aimed at people who already appreciate the importance of the issue but need further information and advice to help them.
- **Fun:** A useful option when dealing with subjects that are considered to be a bit dull and dry, even though they have important implications. Would be an important element for a campaign aimed at school kids and farm safety, for example.
- **Fearful:** This is one of the most popular routes and works on the 'scare them into action' premise: "If you don't do this, you'll pay a high price." Handy for target audiences who are resistant to change or refuse to recognise the significance of a particular problem.

When is the best time to launch?

- Try to tie your campaign into a topical event. For example, the release of government OSH statistics about the issue you want to promote.
- Consider seasonal angles. Is the incidence of the OSH problem you want to draw attention to more prevalent at particular times of the year, such as the winter or spring? If so, run your campaign during these periods.
- Avoid major holiday periods, such as Christmas, when most people will either be away or have their minds on other things.

Draw up a campaign schedule

- Have all leaflets and other promotional materials produced at least two weeks before the launch. Build in time for delays and make sure all information is accurate and approved before it is printed.
- Spread your campaign over a reasonable period of time, typically a month or more. You should aim to start it with an attention-grabbing 'big bang' and then drip-feed news and information evenly across the rest of the period so you maintain a constant news flow.
- A month after its completion, evaluate its success relative to your objective. This can be done, for example, by counting requests for information or by sending questionnaires to a sample of your target audience.

TIPS ON HOW TO WRITE AND PRESENT INFORMATION

How you write and visually present your promotional materials and supporting brochures can make or break your campaign.

Writing hints

Use clear, jargon-free language

- Imagine you're explaining the importance of your campaign to a member of your target audience, face-to-face. Use the same words in your campaign that you would use in this context. Be natural. Don't try to be clever.
- Personalise the text. Talk about 'your business' and 'your staff' and, where possible, slot in references to your target audience's market. For example, 'Failure to comply with the new solvents directive could cost your business up to €10,000 in fines.'
- Avoid long and complicated sentences. A good principle, initially, is to write as you speak and then edit out unnecessary words.



Finland Invalidiitto ry Kumpulantie 1 A 00520 Helsinki, Finland. Brochure on person handling, part of European Week 2000 campaign activities

Get your message across immediately

Anyone reading any text should know the main point you are making within seconds. There are two ways to do this:

- **Headlines:** These should tell as full a story as possible. For example, don't just say 'New product launched', but something like 'New handling device could cut back injuries by 15%.'
- **Body copy:** Whether you are writing a press release, or any other form of literature, you should aim to get your key message across in the first sentence, or the second at the latest. Subsequent sentences should provide factual back-up and elaborate on your main point. Start with the most important points and work your way down to the least significant.

Break up long text with sub-headings and other devices

Large slabs of text are uninviting and often deter people from reading them. Break them up with sub-heads, bullet points, short paragraphs and other devices you see in professional publications, but don't overdo it.

How to improve your campaign's visual impact

- **Choose your supporting images carefully:** Make sure they illustrate your main message. Cartoons used carefully can be a good way of livening up a somewhat dry and boring health and safety message, including showing accidents. However, remember that text on its own can be very powerful.
- **Aim for clarity and simplicity:** Avoid trying to put too much on a single page or board. This will undermine the campaign's focus and confuse your target audience.
- **Create a consistent look and feel:** All your promotional materials, from advertisements to newsletters, should appear to be part of a family. The visual images can vary but the style and tone should be identical. This is largely a design issue and will help prompt 'brand' recognition and reinforce the messages your target audiences have seen elsewhere.

HOW TO GET THE 'CAMPAIGN' MANUAL

The full text of the campaign manual in English is available on the Agency's website at <http://agency.osha.eu.int/publications/reports/>

The printed report 'Getting the Message Across: health and safety campaigning', European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, ISBN 92-95007-20-4 can be ordered from the EC's Publications Office EUR-OP in Luxembourg (<http://eur-op.eu.int/>), or from its sales agents. The price is €7 (excluding VAT).