

Healthy Workplaces Summit 2011 on Safe Maintenance

A summary of the conference

Bilbao, 22 – 23 November 2011

Introduction

More than 200 top safety and health experts from around the world attended the 2011 European Summit on Safe Maintenance in Bilbao, Spain, on November 22-23. The summit marked the climax of the 2010-11 Healthy Workplaces Campaign on Safe Maintenance organised by the European Agency for Safety and Health (EU-OSHA).

This year's event was held in the striking modernist-style Bizkaia Aretoa conference centre overlooking the Guggenheim Museum. The summit in Bilbao drew many distinguished politicians and experts from a variety of fields including László Andor, the EU's Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Dr Christa Sedlatschek, EU-OSHA Director, María Luz Rodriguez, the Spanish Secretary of State for Employment and Dr Danuta Koradecka, representative of the Polish EU Presidency. Also in attendance were Bernadette Ségol, Secretary General of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Kris De Meester, Chair of the Health and Safety Group at BusinessEurope.



Commissioner Andor and Director Sedlatschek with Napo

A slightly humoristic element to the proceedings was lent by the Napo character, who mixed freely with delegates.

Opening statements

László Andor told the summit that EU-OSHA's campaigns, which are now the biggest in the world, play an 'essential role in making Europe's occupational health and safety strategy a reality on the ground.' 'This is especially important in the current economic climate where many Europeans are facing an increased workload and organisations try to do more with less. The Healthy Workplaces Campaign is a chance to get the message across that, even in difficult times, the safety of workers cannot be compromised and must remain a top priority. The fiscal constraints and difficult labour market situation in many countries must not obscure the bigger truth that a safe and healthy workplace is also good for business.'



K. De Meester, B. Ségol, L. Andor, C. Sedlatschek, M. Rodriguez, G. Zabaleta and D. Koradecka at the opening

Dr Christa Sedlatschek, EU-OSHA Director also highlighted the role that the Agency performed in propagating the safe maintenance message: 'Through our Healthy Workplaces Campaign we reach out to millions of European workers, in their own workplaces, and in their own languages. And with each campaign, we manage to involve more campaign partners, and help to organise more awareness-raising events. I am confident that, through this campaign, we have helped to prevent significant numbers of people being hurt at work in Europe.'

Since its launch in April 2010, the Healthy Workplaces Campaign on Safe Maintenance has mobilised thousands of people through awareness raising activities, partnership meetings, and information sessions. Although the Safe Maintenance campaign drew praise, delegates heard that a great many of Europe's workers are still put at risk on a daily basis. Over 5,500 people are killed every year in Europe's workplaces, for example, and a further 6.9 million are injured.

Campaign highlights

Andrew Smith, head of the EU-OSHA Communication and Promotion Unit, and Wioleta Klimaszewska, representative of EU-OSHA's network of national focal points, summarised the overall highlights of the campaign. Mr Smith paid tribute to EU-OSHA's network of partners and also highlighted the role of the European Good Practice Awards for raising standards across the EU and beyond. He also pointed out that the Healthy Workplaces Film Award and the photo competition had helped highlight important issues.

Wioleta Klimaszewska drew attention to the 38 national partnership meetings, 131 stakeholder seminars and training events with more than 11,000 active participants, 11 journalist round tables, 15 press conferences and 75 national news releases that the national focal points organised during the campaign in partnership with EU-OSHA.



Entries to the Polish poster competition

Judith Kirton-Darling, of the European Trades Union Confederation (ETUC), told the conference that 25 percent of Europe's workers still believe that their work puts their health at risk. To try and counter this, Alexander Stuber, of the European Federation of National Maintenance Societies (EFNMS), detailed how its 12,000 members in 22 countries had worked on the campaign. For example, member societies in Spain had held seminars in maintenance risk assessment, Greek members had produced a widely-distributed video, and societies in France, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands had held workshops and meetings. As a result of the campaign, Mr Stuber said, over 90% of its members had appointed a safety, health and environment officer, and 55% had started new initiatives in safe maintenance.

Official campaign partners

The final wave of EU-OSHA's campaign partners also received their official participation certificates at the conference. These included: the European Aggregates Association, European Association of Paritarian Institutions, Golder Associates, Standing Committee of European Doctors, and Syndex. Many of the other 53 campaign partners that had already received their certificates in the first year of the campaign were also present at the summit to celebrate the successful closing of the campaign.



Official campaign partners with participants of the opening session

Workshops

The summit also featured a series of workshops where delegates could hear best-practice advice from experts in their field.

One of the most popular was organised by Peter Rimmer on successful safety and health campaigning. The workshop explored key components to successful campaigning, analysing the difficulties in communicating OSH topics and discussing and sharing the effectiveness of main communications and promotional campaigning tools to determine what makes a campaign successful.

Mr Rimmer concluded from the workshop that a successful safety and health campaign has many interlocking features with detailed planning lying at its heart. Once long-term strategic goals have been defined, specific objectives can then be identified, target audiences pinpointed, and a realistic campaign timetable drawn-up.



Keypads were used for interactive voting on campaigning tools and activities during the workshop.

Two other workshops focused on risks assessment in maintenance and the success factors that underlie safe maintenance.

Jukka Takala, former EU-OSHA Director and rapporteur for the workshop on 'Safe Maintenance and Risk Assessment', told the conference that risk assessments should include contractors and sub-contractors rather than focusing solely on regular workers. The aim of the workshop was to point out the specific challenges of risk assessment in maintenance and to discuss the possibilities to integrate the maintenance aspect into the Online interactive Risk Assessment Tool (OiRA) as a legacy of the campaign on Safe Maintenance.

Dr Danuta Koradecka, rapporteur for the workshop on 'Good Practices in Safe Maintenance', told delegates that good safety and health relied on many interlocking features. Chief among these is an over-arching safety-orientated culture within the organisation. Other crucial factors include well conducted risk assessments, safe work procedures with clear guidelines, and maintenance work should be incorporated into established OSH schemes. In addition, management commitment to safety and health with active worker participation is crucial.

OiRA – Online interactive risk assessment

There was great interest in EU-OSHA's new software tool generator for Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA).

EU-OSHA has developed OiRA, which is a comprehensive, easy to use and cost-free web application. OiRA helps small and micro organisations put in place a thorough step-by-step risk assessment process – from the evaluation of workplace risks, decision making on preventive actions, through to monitoring and reporting.



Eusebio Rial, Head of the Research and Prevention Unit at EU-OSHA introducing the session

Although OiRA is still in its earliest stages of deployment, OiRA tools tailored to specific industries and sectors have been developed by several organisations, notably by the Department of Labour Inspection in Cyprus, which is currently implementing it in the country's hairdressing salons. Hairdressers in Cyprus often complain of generalised fatigue and pain in their shoulders, neck and back. This is due in part to poor working practices. If these could be improved by taking on board the results of a comprehensive risk assessment, then it's hoped that these conditions would decline in incidence. Marios Charalambous, an Inspector for the Cyprus Department of Labour Inspection, said OiRA was now online and 'many employers in the sector are using it for

the preparation of the risk assessment of their workplaces.’ As an example, the project has gained the active support of the Cyprus Hairdressers Association.

It is hoped that the OiRA module on maintenance will be an important legacy of this campaign.

Photo competition

The winners of EU-OSHA’s pan-European photo competition on safety and health in the workplace was announced at the conference. The Polish photographer Krzysztof Maksymowicz was awarded the first prize of €3,000 for his photograph ‘dress maker’, while the second and third prizes of €2,000 and €1,000 were handed to Isa Kurt of Turkey for his photo ‘Grow Up’ and Saša Kosanović of Croatia for ‘Gold panning’ respectively. A ‘youth prize’ of €1,000 for the best entrant under-21 was presented to Paweł Ruda of Poland for his imaginative and provocative ‘Cold Sandwich.’



Winners of the photo competition with jury member P. Rimmer and Director C. Sedlatschek

Outlook

One of the major barriers to improving workplace safety and health is lack of risk awareness. This is a particular problem for small organisations.

According to the European Survey on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER): 'In the 12% of establishments not carrying out regular health and safety checks, the most frequently cited reason is that they are 'not necessary because we do not have major problems' (71%). As this reason is commonest among the smallest establishments, it raises the question of whether smaller enterprises are less likely to have major problems or whether they are less aware of OSH issues.'

Organisations are unlikely to take action if they are unaware of risks in the workplace. Therefore, if the EU is to achieve its 2012 goal of reducing workplace accidents by a quarter, then we will need to significantly raise awareness of workplace risks, particularly in smaller organisations. ESENER has highlighted that the most effective way of improving workplace safety and health is for employers to actively engage with their employees and the whole supply chain. To this end, EU-OSHA's next Healthy Workplaces Campaign Working Together for Risk Prevention will focus on galvanising the support of employers, employees, their representatives and the whole supply chain and other stakeholders, to work together to reduce risks in the workplace. Smaller enterprises will be particularly welcome to take part.

We also need to involve the social partners, from the EU level right down to individual organisations. And we need to promote a culture of risk prevention in European workplaces, which means reaching out to even the smallest businesses, raising awareness and offering clear advice and guidance.

The 2012-13 Healthy Workplaces Campaign is decentralised and is designed to help national authorities, companies, organisations, managers, workers and their representatives, and other stakeholders, to work together to enhance health and safety in the workplace. The Agency hopes that its partners will continue to show their support and join in the new campaign.

