



Healthy Workplaces Summit, Bilbao, 11–12 November 2013

Working Together for Risk Prevention

The Healthy Workplaces Summit marked the official end of the 2012–13 campaign, *Working together for risk prevention*, EU-OSHA's most successful campaign to date, supported by our focal points, hundreds of organisations, media partners and 87 official campaign partners. The event brought together around 300 delegates from across the EU, including occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals, researchers, doctors, decision makers and policy advisers, representatives of employers and trade unions, communications professionals and press.

The aim of the summit was to share the lessons learned from the campaign, exchange good practice and discuss strategies for involving workers, employers and social partners in continuing the good work generated by the campaign to improve safety and health at work. The highlights of the event were the workshops and panel discussions, which gave plenty of opportunity for interaction and discussion, and the presentation of the first Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) OSH Award.

Opening session

All of the speakers stressed the importance of working together, particularly at a time when the economic climate is so difficult. Just as it is essential for managers and workers to work together, so it is important for Member States to support each other through difficult times and help build capacity in countries that have recently joined the EU. Several of the speakers also congratulated the winners of the 11th Good Practice Awards for their remarkable achievements, including those of Basque firm Protón Electrónica, which developed a risk prevention model for small companies and demonstrated that it is possible for even very small companies to successfully implement OSH.

Key points

- The fact that times are difficult must not be allowed to interfere with risk prevention at work. We must keep challenging the notion that OSH is an 'administrative burden'. On the contrary, good management of OSH is key to improving business performance and building a strong, competitive Europe.
- We need to dispel the notion that OSH is solely a management issue: workers should be encouraged to take responsibility for both their own and their colleagues' safety and health. Active participation will motivate them to take ownership of OSH.



- Working with social partners is very important: the tripartite approach is the most effective in terms of risk prevention. The parties must respect each other and ‘speak the same language’ to avoid misunderstandings.
- There is a need for a European strategy on health and safety at work, which would apply as a minimum across all EU Member States. Only that will ensure that OSH is taken seriously across Europe and reduce the incidence of preventable occupational diseases and deaths in all countries.
- Management, workers and social partners need a *compelling common goal* for risk prevention to be effective. Inspirational leadership from management will motivate the workforce to embrace its goals.
- Although this campaign is ending and the focus will shift to the topic of the next campaign, it is essential not to lose the momentum but to build on it and make *working together* the sustainable cornerstone of OSH.

The Enterprise Europe Network OSH Award

There are more than 20 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Europe. They employ more than 65 % of the workforce and sadly account for more than 82 % of workplace injuries and over 90 % of fatalities. Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) helps to disseminate OSH messages to those SMEs through its 600 or more members across the EU.

The EEN OSH Award has been set up to recognise outstanding promotion of OSH messages. The first-ever award was presented to Confederación de Empresarios de Aragón (CREA) for its campaign ‘From school to work placement’, which reached 110 SMEs and over 400 students. The judges thought it a particularly worthy winner because it was targeting the workforce of the future.



Workshops

These provided an opportunity for in-depth sharing and discussion of good practice.

Workshop 1: Good practices in management leadership and worker participation

What motivates people to observe OSH?

- Knowing someone who has been seriously injured or killed;
- knowing the people you work with, e.g. in family-run businesses;
- focusing on clients’ requirements.

What are the prerequisites for successful OSH?

- Top management must buy in and lead by example—‘walk the talk’.
- Management need to recognise that certain types of psychosocial risks are not simply an issue between two people—‘a personality clash’—but are an organisational problem.

- Employees should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own and their colleagues' safety, e.g. by having members of a team take it in turns to be 'safety captain'.
- A perceived lack of money should not be an obstacle. How can we put a value on the loss of a person's health or well-being or even their life? The West Offaly Dairy Discussion Group, Ireland, was originally set up so that members could share ideas on improving productivity. However, they soon found that they spent more time sharing ideas about improving safety.

What challenges need to be overcome?

- Cultural differences leading to differences in the interpretation of OSH messages;
- young people and inexperienced new workers joining the workforce mean a need for ongoing review and training
- the increasing use of subcontractors—the same standards of OSH must apply to them.

Workshop 2: Benchmarking in OSH

The benchmarking event, held in Brussels in June 2013, was an important part of the risk prevention campaign. Already two major companies have volunteered to hold benchmarking events in future. The intention is to hold a similar event on psychosocial risks during the next campaign.

What are the challenges?

- Again, leadership commitment is essential—'walking the talk'.
- A 'no blame culture' or, preferably, a 'just culture' is needed to foster mutual trust between the organisation and employees and allow continuous review and improvement.
- There is a need for common standards and guidelines across the EU because interpretation and implementation of regulations varies.
- The difficulties for SMEs were recognised—it is important that OSH benchmarking takes account of their needs and concentrates on best practice and continuous improvement.
- Setting objectives for continuous improvement becomes increasingly difficult when injury or illness rates are low.
- OSH is lagging behind environmental sustainability in terms of corporate measuring and reporting initiatives. Is this something on which EU-OSHA might provide a lead?

Evaluation of the 2012–13 campaign shows that 90 % of campaign partners found it very effective and would get involved again.



Workshop 3: Successful networking and campaigning in OSH

What are the key points for successful campaigning?

- Again, demonstrable leadership—management should be actively involved.
- Planning is essential—as is research to understand the audience.
- The communications strategy should be based around education and entertainment—to get the messages across effectively—and use media appropriate to the target audience, e.g. engaging a local rap artist to make a safety video for young construction workers in Brazil.
- Participation is key—not just by those running the campaign but also by the audience.
- Understand and manage stakeholders to harness their power and influence.
- Evaluate the campaign—both qualitatively and quantitatively—and learn from the findings.

A successful campaign will raise awareness and can have the effect of increasing the incidence of, say, an occupational disease—because of the ‘tip of the iceberg’ effect.



Working together for OSH—successful organisational and individual interventions

Professor Rüdiger Trimpop kicked off the second day of the summit with a thought-provoking and entertaining presentation.

Key points

- Active participation encourages employees to take responsibility for their own and their colleagues' safety. We should be aiming for 'risk competency'.
- Workplace hazards are changing in Europe: there are far fewer accidents related to heavy industry but far more occupational traffic accidents and stress-related illnesses, neither of which have benefited from the recent advances in work design and control.
- Leaders tend to work longer hours than workers yet suffer less work-related stress because they have the choice. It is the workers who have little or no influence over their working patterns who are more likely to suffer work-related stress. As a result, management and employees will risk assess stressful things differently.
- Safety representatives and OSH professionals should have direct access to top management. For example, involving occupational drivers in 'safety circles' comprising both management and workers is the most effective way of reducing occupational traffic accidents.

Panel discussion: It's about us—let's work together

Each panellist gave a short presentation and then the panel took questions from the audience.

Key points

- Participation, personal contact and relationship building are key to the successful implementation of OSH. However, although workers have a right to participate in principle, in practice they are not always able to exercise that right.
- We need an agreement at EU level to ensure that the law is interpreted and implemented in the same way across the EU.
- The campaign has focused on the role of good leadership as the key to successful implementation of OSH; however, everyone should be a leader in the workplace, i.e. take responsibility for safety.
- To help SMEs and micro organisations to embrace OSH, focus on the real benefits in terms of business performance, not the costs.
- Data on the incidence of occupational accidents and diseases are influenced by how they are reported. For example, in Lithuania official figures suggest that the incidence of skin diseases in hairdressers is about 26 cases a year. However, dermatologists would put the figures closer to 26 cases a week.



Healthy Workplaces—the way forward

Although the summit is the closing event for the 2012–13 campaign, the work on risk prevention will build on the momentum gained from the campaign to become sustainable. The campaign has been remarkably successful, particularly given the current economic climate and the effect that it might have had on working conditions.

Our next campaign is already attracting a lot of attention. The 2014–15 campaign, *Healthy Workplaces Manage Stress*, tackles the topic of work-related stress, one of the most challenging issues in OSH. Surveys have shown that over half of European workers report that work-related stress is common in their workforce, and 40 % think that it is not well handled. Furthermore, nearly 80 % of managers in Europe are concerned by work-related stress and yet less than 30 % of businesses have taken any action to deal with it. The most likely explanation for the disparity is that employers often consider psychosocial risks more difficult to manage than the 'traditional' OSH risks. This need not be the case. However, clearly there is a need for motivation and support for management, social partners and workers to help them to tackle work-related stress.

The 2014–15 campaign will provide that motivation and support, focusing on *working together* for success and reinforcing the message that OSH is a positive contribution to business success, not an administrative burden.



Key themes

A number of key themes came up throughout the summit: the importance of worker participation, active leadership engagement and working with social partners; the need for a framework to ensure the consistent interpretation and implementation of legislation across the EU; the importance of focusing on OSH as being good for business rather than an administrative burden; the difficulties experienced by SMEs in implementing OSH; and, above all, the importance of *working together*. These will be carried forward to inform the next campaign.

The summit closed with lunch, with Napo in attendance as the guest of honour.

