

The value of Pre-confidence in Public Education – how we in SIESO can help

Ron Edmond

Chairman Public Education Group - NSCWIP

The next few years will see an ongoing process of developing ways to educate and inform the public regarding emergency responses. The resources of broadcast technology, good education strategies and good response techniques will all be brought into play. However another issue must also be tackled and that is in relation to the faith of the public in those who deliver the wise words and design facilities and systems.

Natural responses to emergencies by those affected are usually wrong ones. People tend to run away, stay outside and worst of all become spectators to an incident. These actions will inevitably result in increased casualties and present even greater resource problems for the responders. The necessary actions are very simple to understand and follow, and are always started with GO IN, STAY IN, TUNE IN. But that simplicity creates its own problem in the public mind. Can doing these simple things really make a difference? Can I trust the political bodies that give me this advice?

In a nutshell – if the public are to cooperate they must believe firstly that there exists the honest intention of minimising loss and secondly that the advice offered is the distillation of independent quality knowledge.

A basis of trust must be built up, a pre-confidence, that the techniques are sound and that when the emergency services give advice it is in the best interests of the majority of people. Part of that is never to pretend that everyone can be protected from every hazard.

Wise words from good teachers have always had limited appeal to mankind. Demonstrations of what works, learnt from past mistakes, is a much more powerful tool. Hence showing the public that each time an emergency occurs lessons are learnt – sometimes from getting it wrong and sometimes by people doing the right thing – and then shared with them is very positive. The making available of quality knowledge, in readily and easily understood ways, is a true confidence builder.

Wise bodies have long since recognised the need for common accident data bases and proposals for a wide ranging working party to pursue this worthwhile objective are covered in the SIESO Matters section of this issue of ISM. Difficulties do

however, exist in producing these databases in an era where one cannot generally release findings or causes before due legal processes have taken place. That may take a long time and there can be a significant delay before the details are known.

The public, however, do not need the detail nor even the reasons behind the failures or successes only the lessons to reinforce the simple actions to take., i.e. what exists, why it exists and how their behaviour can make a difference.

To give an example we can look at the factory explosion in Enschede, in Holland. Once the initial fire started many members of the public did not GO IN, STAY IN, TUNE IN, they went and stood outside the gates to watch. Their presence hampered the emergency services control of the area and responses and when the factory exploded, shortly afterwards, many became unnecessary casualties of the incident. All of this was plain to see as it unfolded on the television coverage on the day.

Similarly, incident responders and emergency planners within SIESO see events regularly where these kinds of lessons are all too obvious. The full investigations of major accidents will reveal many lessons but those who experience events first hand on a day to day basis often see the potential benefit of simplicity.

Those of us involved with the Public Education Group of NSCWIP are in the process of establishing ways to communicate, to the public, a variety of pre-confidence giving information. These will include the use of www.nscwip.info and www.ukresilience.info, printed material and digital TV. The start point however is a supply of lessons learnt, good and bad. What we require is knowledge of good examples past and present, local, national or international they will all be most welcome.

If any SIESO members feel they have good lessons for the public arising from emergency responses, please feed them to any Council member and we will continually add to our database, which will be specific to public education but also complementary with, and added to, any common database on accidents that emerges in the future.

It is a classic way in which we the practitioners can offer the public a confidence in independent knowledge, honestly given, that improves their safety and helps the emergency responders.

How can you make the public aware of the potential dangers of electricity?

Ann Walker

Public Safety & Media Adviser, Yorkshire Electricity Distribution Limited

This is the question faced by CE Electric's distribution businesses, Northern Electric Distribution and Yorkshire Electricity Distribution, on a daily basis. NEDL and YEDL, subsidiaries of CE Electric UK, are responsible for distributing electricity through a network of thousands of kilometres of overhead line and underground cable to more than 3.5 million homes and businesses from Northern Lincolnshire, through Yorkshire and the North East. Both businesses take their responsibility to inform both children and adults alike, about the potential dangers of overhead power lines, electricity substations and street furniture, very seriously.

As well as the obvious means of displaying danger of death safety signs on electrical equipment, the companies run safety advertisements and competitions with both local newspapers and radio stations. In addition to this, specially trained staff give safety talks in schools and at Crucial Crew venues.

Crucial Crew workshops are held all over the UK for school children aged 8-11. At these workshops, children are presented with various dangerous or challenging situations such as a football going over the wall of an electricity substation or a road traffic accident.

The Safer York Partnership approached NEDL and YEDL earlier this year asking for their input into safety scenarios all

aimed at increasing the awareness of children to the potential power of electricity. Safety experts from the two companies have worked alongside interactive media specialists, York Multimedia Network, to develop scenes helping children to safely discover the consequences of not treating electricity with respect.

Crucial Crew Interactive is a computer-based version of the workshop where children navigate through a game-like environment, which presents them with a series of choices. If they pick the wrong one, they may be killed – if they get it right, they are praised and move on to the next stage of the game.

In 2003, interactive media specialists, York Multimedia Network Limited, developed CCI in association with the Safer York Partnership and other partners including the Police, Fire and Ambulance Services, Transco, the Rail Safety and Standards Board, NHS, St John's Ambulance and now NEDL/YEDL.

NEDL and YEDL decided to offer 3,000 schools in their areas free copies of the CCI CD-ROM. SIESO approached NEDL/YEDL asking permission for the "Go In Stay In and Tune In" video and quiz to be included in the content and NEDL/YEDL were delighted to be able to help. The CDs were distributed in October.