



Winners announced at national health & safety awards

AUCKLAND, New Zealand, 7 May 2009

KiwiRail took out the supreme award at the New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards 2009 gala dinner, held at SKYCITY Convention Centre in Auckland last night.

The awards, in their fifth year, are organised by Safeguard magazine and proudly supported by the Department of Labour.

Safeguard managing editor Peter Bateman, who was on the judging panel, says KiwiRail impressed the judges with its commitment to measure its own safety culture by engaging an outside facilitator to conduct confidential focus groups involving staff.

This sophisticated project, he says, generated an impressive list of roadblocks to better health and safety, but also ways to overcome them. More than this, the process helped to seriously engage staff and management in health and safety concerns and served to underpin the success of other safety initiatives.

“This was quite a brave project for management to approve, as to some extent it handed over power to an outsider working confidentially with ordinary staff, with no way to control or predict the outcomes. But the outcomes prove the risk was worthwhile.”

The winner of the supreme award – the Department of Labour/ACC Best Overall Contribution to Improving Health and Safety in New Zealand – was decided from among the winners of the eight award categories open to organisations.

KiwiRail’s initiative also won the category NZ Safety Best Initiative to Encourage Engagement in Health & Safety.

“Health and safety people are the unsung heroes of New Zealand workplaces and thoroughly deserve one night of celebration each year,” says Bateman.

Too often, he says, health and safety issues feature in the media only after a workplace fatality. The awards are an opportunity to celebrate the good news about health and safety, and to share knowledge about initiatives that have worked well.

“Health and safety practitioners are by nature collegial and more than willing to share their thinking with others. The awards help to highlight good work and to assist in spreading innovative and effective ideas more widely.”

The category winners are:

Air New Zealand best initiative to address a safety hazard

Paper Reclaim, Auckland

Designed and built a machine to enable large rolls of scrap paper to be cut open for processing, eliminating serious manual handling and cutting hazards and hugely boosting productivity: what used to take ten men eight hours now takes two men one hour.

Department of Labour best initiative to address a health hazard

Air New Zealand Group, Christchurch

Broke new ground internationally by comprehensively tackling the health hazard to aircraft engineers posed by beryllium dust, a cause of respiratory disease increasingly found in high-tech alloys.

OfficeMax best initiative to improve employee wellness

Metrowater, Auckland

Raised employee participation levels in exercise and other wellness programmes to more than 75% by regularly seeking rich feedback from staff and learning to factor in peer support, constant motivation, achievable goals, and gender/cultural differences.

NZ Safety best initiative to encourage engagement in health & safety

KiwiRail Corporate, Auckland

Ran a sophisticated programme to measure the company’s culture of safety at two key sites using confidential focus groups and employees working in pairs. The resulting flood of insights identified roadblocks and ways of overcoming them, and helped significantly lift staff engagement in health and safety, and helped other innovative initiatives to flourish.

SICK best design or technology initiative

NZ Steel, Glenbrook

Devised a computerised animated training module showing its large and hazardous site to enable truck drivers to safely navigate their way around, speeding up the safety induction process and also using animation to show drivers acceptable methods for safely securing loads of steel to trucks.

Impac best health and safety initiative by a small business

PJ & MJ Olsen Ltd and Skyline Harvesting Ltd, Tokoroa

Learned a new safety culture method and applied it to daily operations, developing the ability of supervisors and other operational managers to communicate and lead teams. The result has been better safety communications, higher levels of incident reporting, and greater productivity.

Transfield Services best significant health and safety initiative by a large organisation

Northern Gateway Alliance, Auckland

Recognised that safety performance on the large and complex Puhoi motorway extension project was declining and addressed it by introducing two new initiatives, which succeeded in shifting managers' safety focus from reactive to proactive.

ACC best leadership of an industry sector or region

Otago District Health Board, Dunedin

Has succeeded in positively embedding health and safety from top to bottom in a uniquely challenging industry sector, to the extent that it has become an acknowledged health and safety leader in its region and beyond.

Safeguard health and safety practitioner of the year

Paul Reyneke, Foodstuffs (Auckland)

Challenged his organisation's belief that its health and safety performance was OK and turned. He overturned how safety was done using counter-intuitive methods based on theoretical models. Attitudes to safety have now moved from minimum compliance to enthusiastic ownership at all levels, injuries have declined 90% over the past two years, and the new low injury level is being sustained and reduced still further.

Ross Wilson – NZCTU most influential employee

Michelle Scarf, Otago District Health Board

Her ability to engage other staff in health and safety has become legendary within her organisation, by building effective teams and using an unorthodox fun approach, including dressing up as Priscilla Presley and Austin Powers during major health and safety participation events.

Supreme winner

The Department of Labour/ACC best overall contribution to improving health and safety in New Zealand

KiwiRail Corporate, Auckland

Lifetime Achievement awards were made to:

Marlene Thomson, former senior employee of the Department of Labour and long-time member and office-holder of the NZ Occupational Health Nurses Association, for her services in promoting awareness of occupational health.

Ross Wilson, lawyer and trade unionist, for his services in engaging workers in health and safety through unions and via training courses for elected health and safety representatives.

Special commendations were made to:

Department of Labour for leading the Puataunofu Manukau Project to raise awareness of health and safety among Manukau's Pacific Island community.

Transfield Services, Whangarei branch, for designing a chain twitch release tool to eliminate a serious and long-standing hazard in the trucking industry.

Judging panel

The judging panel of five included representatives from the Department of Labour, ACC, the NZ Council of Trade Unions, Safeguard, and last year's winner of the health and safety practitioner of the year award.

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