# A Short Cut can be a Quick Way to Hospital

## Do Safety Slogans <u>Really</u> Help Keep Workers Safe?

The word **slogan** originated from the Gaelic *sluagh-ghairm*. *Sluagh* meaning "army", and *ghairm* meaning "a cry or shout". So in essence **slogan** means "battle cry".

The original slogans of the Gaelic speaking clans of Scotland and Ireland of the 1500s were usually the name of their clan homeland, or a chief, or a renowned ancestor. So the main purpose of a slogan was to inspire combatants by reminding them why they were fighting – spurring them on to fight harder and even die for their common cause and the safety of their people.

*For a slogan to have the affect of causing people to lay down their lives, the people must first fully believe the validity of the cause, then they must willingly submit to the cause and its leaders. Only when the first two steps are fulfilled will a slogan have the ability to drive them to action.*

Successful wartime slogans include, "Remember the Alamo" used by Texans when fighting the Mexicans after the Mexican slaughter at the Alamo; "Death Before Dishonour" by Roman legions; "Viva la France" by French patriots; "Victory for Goddess Kali (goddess of death) by Indian Gorkhas; "Banzai" (short for "long live the emperor") by the Japanese; and "Allahu Akbah" (God is Great/er) by the jihadist armies of Islam.

In the 1700s "slogans" started being used by political parties to influence voters by pin-pointing specific fears or desires, as well as distracting the commoners from other serious political issues. "England Will Fight to the Last American", "All the Way with LBJ", "A Fair Day's Work for a Fair Day's Pay", "Black is Beautiful", "White is Beautiful", and "Better Dead than Red". In Australia, "It's Time" and "Jobs not GST" were slogans instrumental in election wins for the Labour Party simply because enough voters were distracted from the real issues by their self interest.

It was with this use of the "slogan" by politicians that the word lost much of its original meaning as a battle cry. A slogan came to represent a way to influence people for selfish reasons, rather than to inspire people to act on a commonly held cause which is bigger than individuals.

Businesses soon caught on to the possibility that **"**slogans" can influence the buying decisions of the uninformed public, e.g. "Finger Lickin' Good"; "Just do it"; "It's the Real Thing"; "Melts in Your Mouth Not Your

Hands"; and "When you care enough to send the very best".

Because of the popularity of "slogans" in advertising, many businesses and Health & Safety organisations began thinking that all it takes to reduce the number, and cost, of workplace injuries is a slogan. **That's when Safety Slogans DO NOT help to keep workers safe**.

A bright new "Safety First" sign will NOT inspire workers to clean up a spill they did not make, stop texting while driving, do a Take-5 risk assessment when they come back from lunch, take the keys out of the forklift when it's parked, nor stop fooling around at work. **Safety Slogans have NO POWER to motivate workers to focus on safety and act safely if they do not FIRST believe in the cause, and willingly submit to their leaders in that cause**.

"Safety First" is, however, a great slogan for inspiring workers to focus on their safety and that of others **if** the workplace believes in the cause, has successfully won over the workers to the cause, and has leaders who model the cause. In such an environment, a leader can quickly inspire safe behaviour with the battle cry, "Safety First".

But, if the only commitment a workplace has to safety is putting on a show for their insurance company or their safety regulator, no number of slogans plastered on walls and written in bold type on induction manuals, will influence workers to behave "safely".

**For a Safety Slogan to *work* it MUST be based in a culture which believes in "safety" because it is successfully and repeatedly communicated to, and encouraged in, the workers, and modelled by all managers and officers of the workplace**.

Whether a Safety Slogan is general or for a specific issue, Safety Slogans ONLY Help Keep People Safe to the degree that workers understand and believe in the cause, and willingly submit to leadership in that cause.

**Conclusion**: Don't blame the Slogans. If you're not seeing results from your Safety Slogans consider that it's time to look into your organisation's core beliefs about safety, and how well that is being communicated to the workers.