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Rapid Response Achieves 100% Participation in District 9

Using the person to person techniques of Rapid Response, District 9 now has 100 percent participation by its locals in the program.

District 9 Director Stan Johnson said everyone in the district from the staff to the program's volunteer state coordinators contacted local union presidents requesting their participation and offering assistance.

"It was a monumental task getting this done," said District 9 Rapid Response Coordinator Greg England.

Johnson said District 9 has always led in Rapid Response activity and action. Over 57,000 notes were mailed to congressional offices about HR 1992, the anti-sweatshop bill. The district recently gave plaques to locals 878, 7655, 461, 1192, 1535 and 193 for their top performance in Rapid Response.

With the increase in the number of locals in the district as a result of the USWA-PACE merger, Johnson saw the need to get them involved politically.

"We're coming into an election year. If we're going to build activism in 2008 it is important to build a foundation for that activism by getting as much participation now," he said.

Top Performers Tell How It's Done

Local 1192 President Howard Pickels said he gets a lot of participation from his members by emailing Rapid Response alerts to them. The Employee Free Choice Act particularly activated people, he said.

"A lot of times somebody will stop me and talk about a particular issue," he said.

Pickels said he has seen issues like gun rights, same sex marriage and abortion divert people's attention.

"Rapid Response can help get your mind on issues you need to be watching," he said.

In response to the action call for obtaining cosponsors of the anti-sweatshop bill, Local 7655 generated 6,700 letters to legislators. Local 7655 President William Jones attributes the large response to the network his local has developed. There is a Rapid Response chair on each shift who gets letters out to the stewards who then get the members to sign the letters. The local also gets members of the community to sign letters.

"They (members) know it's something important and affects their job when they get this information," Jones said. "Rapid Response lets politicians know how we feel on things affecting our jobs, our communities and labor as a whole."

Local 878 out of Union City, Tenn., has been the top performing local in the international union for the Rapid Response program since it began. The 2,200-member local generated 15,074 letters to legislators about the anti-sweatshop bill. Spouses are encouraged to sign Rapid Response letters as well.

Keeping People Informed

"We keep people informed," said Local 878 President Harry Alford. He said on each shift the local puts

out 150 of the action calls or information alerts in break areas and on bulletin boards, and posts the material on the local's website so the members are constantly reading what is going on.

Sometimes the local inserts information alerts into the newsletter that is mailed out to members' homes. If there is a small window of time to act, the local will do a gate handout at each shift.

The local's full-time staff does the research for the letters and writes them for the members to sign. Each senator and representative receives a different version of the letter, and letters are sent to them at staggered times.

Getting the letters distributed and receiving them back is the hard part, Alford said. After the letters are written, they are sent to the stewards who give them to Rapid Response floor coordinators in each division. Then the letters are sent to groups of 20 to 25 members who then hand them out to their coworkers.

An announcement is made at the union meeting and in the newsletter of the number of letters generated. "We set our own goals and push for them," Alford said.

To locals that have not gotten involved with Rapid Response he said: "It's all of our future and we should all participate. If everybody stepped up to the plate, we would make a change."