



Health and Safety

PSAC PRAIRIE REGION HEALTH & SAFETY CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 18-20, 2009 FINAL CONFERENCE REPORT



Clint Wirth, PRAIRIE REGION COUNCIL, Health and Safety Committee
Rahil Ahmad, PRAIRIE REGION COUNCIL, Health and Safety Committee
Bill Osborne, PRAIRIE REGION COUNCIL, Health and Safety Committee

Bruce Campbell, Regional Representative, Health and Safety,
Prairie Region, Public Service Alliance of Canada



The opening remarks and orientation to the area was provided by Rahil Ahmad and Clint Wirth representing The Prairie Region Council Health and Safety Committee. Bill Osborne from the council was unable to attend the conference. This brief overview provided insight in to the process and format of the following days. Unlike many previous conferences the emphasis was to be sharing the knowledge of the participants. Sharing solutions and approaches to the collective concerns. While some structure was provided the main process centred on developing solutions based on sharing experiences.

In the Final analysis there were 14 Components and the Directly Chartered Local represented by the 53 member participants. The final breakdown was 31 female and 22 male. The Equity Representation was roughly proportional to the overall membership within the Prairies. The Provincial participant breakdown was 11 from Manitoba, 22 from Saskatchewan and 20 from Alberta. There were 107 original applicants to attend the Conference. In addition to participants there were three staff members involved. Louise Mardell, Monika Duggal and Bruce Campbell all contributed to the success of this venture. This all speaks to the need to expand our community of involvement and continue to expand the program at every opportunity.

Keynote address for the opening evening was provided by Sister Robyn Benson, Regional Executive Vice-President, Prairie Region of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Robyn spoke about the importance of the Health and Safety Program to the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the expanding emphasis placed on the program specifically within the Prairies. The need for continued diligence and activism around related issues was brought forward. Robyn looked forward to the involvement of everyone in promoting the program. Sister Benson confirmed the purpose of the Conference. She saw this as the best possible springboard to future expansion of the program.

While confirming what is going on during the weekend the true success will be measured in what is accomplished in the upcoming years. It is vital that we look in to the future and set realistic goals and work to achieve these goals. Sister Benson promised her continued support for the Health and Safety Program both in the Prairies and on a National basis.



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Administration overview (expense claims), was provided by Sister Monika Duggal. Sister Duggal did a great deal of work in making this Conference a reality. Sister Duggal also provided a great deal of support in looking after the details that arose over the course of the Conference. She worked long hours to make sure that the administration details of the Conference went flawlessly.

The anti-harassment committee, Edith Keefe-Macleod and Clint Wirth were introduced to all attending. The anti-harassment statement was read and a copy was provided to each participant.

The scent free policy statement was then read out. Again a copy was provided to each participant.

The next item was an explanation/discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the Prairies Region Council Health and Safety committee. Explanation/discussion of the roles and responsibilities of the Public Service Alliance of Canada was broken down by the various sections of this commitment.

The information regarding the Headquarters Staff was provided by Brother Bruce Campbell. The Headquarters Staff responsible are primarily Jeff Bennie and Denis St. Jean. They organize the National Health and Safety Conference. They provide input on a National level regarding legislation and other legal reviews. They sit on certain National Policy Committees to assist the Component involved. They also negotiate the National Joint Council terms and conditions. In addition they are responsible for helping coordinate the program for the full organization.

Within the Prairie Region each office has a role in working with locals and individual members regarding Health and Safety concerns. Sister Louise Mardell provided a brief overview of the sorts of issues that come to her attention and her normal process in dealing with these. Sister Mardell is the Regional Representative working out of the Saskatoon Office of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Many of the issues that Sister Mardell deals with regarding Health and Safety take the form of referrals to further sources of information and guidance. Regional Offices are often the first contact for both members and committee participants looking for more information on issues such as Disability, Return to Work, Committee Roles and Responsibilities, related training opportunities and Legal Rights (Know, Participate and Refuse).

Brother Bruce Campbell then explained the role of the Regional Representative Health and Safety as it is developing. This is not a full time dedicated position as presently envisioned. The position is largely an expansion of the responsibilities already outlined by Sister Mardell. A major purpose of this Conference is to provide direction so that work in the Region can progress and be the best use of resources for the membership.

Brother Campbell provides representation on some of the Government Employees Compensation Act Cases as well as Workers Compensation Cases in the Prairies. He has as well provided guidance around a number of Disability Issues and Return to Work Situations. He has worked with numerous Committees to assist with addressing Health and Safety issues.



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Brother Campbell has also provided detailed submissions, working with the Regional Vice President's Office, on legislative reviews of the Workplace Health and Safety Act in Manitoba and the Workers Compensation Act in Manitoba. Brother Campbell acts as the referral from the Regional Offices regarding Health and Safety Issues. He has provided the PSAC Training for Health and Safety in all of the Regional Offices within the Prairies. In addition on request Brother Campbell has worked with various employers to provide training to both employee and employer representatives sitting on Committees. Related costs for Joint Training have been paid by the employer involved.

The understanding by Brother Campbell is that one of the major accomplishments from this Conference will be a starting point for everyone working together. This will better clarify his goals over the upcoming years. We will be looking toward specific goals and accomplishments rather than general statements of philosophy. This will require the continued dedication of those in attendance. The dedication of those that applied and were not included because of the limitation on funding. We will look for the commitment of those that have worked on these issues in the past, and those who simply couldn't attend because of conflicts with other priorities.

The Prairie Region Council, more specifically the Health and Safety Sub-committee of the Council, as the elected body here present will need to have a pivotal roll in advancing the cause of Health and Safety within the Prairies.

Brother Campbell also explained that he will be reporting to the Regional Staff at the upcoming Staff Conference regarding the accomplishments and where we go from here.

The Conference contract was developed by all the participants to ensure a common understanding of the expectations of the group. This exercise centred on a joint commitment to the process. The central recognition was that only through mutual respect could we all share and gain from this experience. Details for an effective meeting such as the need for punctuality and the need for respectful speech were also agreed upon.

Individual introductions/expectations were completed first in small groups and then as a report back to the full group. Some of the items that individuals hoped to see addressed during the Conference were:

- How does a Scent Free Policy work?
- How do we obtain proper Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) training?
- How do we deal with physical issues such as temperature, air quality and ergonomics?
- Discussions related to H1N1, impacts on our members, issues to be aware of and how do we deal with these in a positive meaningful manner?
- Individuals looked to increased networking and communication as a result of this Conference.
- The Conference was seen as an opportunity to see new issues and new perspectives on old issues.
- This was seen as an opportunity to "Get People to Care" and see how we motivate and involve the membership of the PSAC in Health and Safety issues.



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- Air Quality issues are a general concern that many individuals would like to learn more about and be able to deal with more effectively.
- Procedures and ideas for getting headquarters involved so that problems in the field that are beyond the resources available in the field can be addressed. Some issues are national in nature and require coordination of levels of the organization.
- Ideas on developing an effective policy around workplace violence issues are a major concern. This is important given the related Federal and Provincial changes in legislation.
- Issues around how we get the employer to actually follow through on promises and good intentions.
- Dealing with workplace issues of “Stress”, “Poisonous Environments” which in some cases has deteriorated to the point of the employer monitoring bathroom breaks.
- How do we deal with our own members failing to follow safety procedures?
- How do we deal with scent free issues? Individual and (not versus – but rather respecting) Collective rights in this regard and in regard to many related issues?
- Bottom line from this full discussion everyone came to this Conference wanting to contribute. That is to share their concerns, solutions and ideas and listen to and learn from others’ concerns, solutions and ideas. This includes sharing best practices as well as learning from others’ mistakes. In this way we all broaden our knowledge and are better equipped to deal with issues, both old and emerging, in the workplace and get resolutions.

The next work was group work on the violence issue (handout provided at time of registration).

The purpose of the handout was to generate discussion in small groups and then within the larger context of the full Conference. While the handout dealt directly with Health Care it was clear that the issues are not unique to any one group within the PSAC membership.

The beginning of the Article reads:

“If you’ve visited an emergency room, acute care, or longterm care facility in B.C. recently you may have noticed some new signs. “Violence, foul language and abusive behaviours are not acceptable,” they read. “Verbal threats or acts of violence will not be tolerated and may result in removal from this facility and/or prosecution.” The words are forceful and reflect a disturbing fact of working in the health care sector: at no other job are employees more likely to be verbally abused, bitten, scratched, or bruised. These are among the more mundane attacks that health care workers can face every day. There are also the incidents that make headlines: a nurse stabbed at New Westminsters’ Royal Columbian Hospital; and an elderly volunteer at Campbell River Hospital who died following an assault by a patient.

An issue too long ignored

Working in an environment where such acts of violence occur contributes to the stress and burnout plaguing this sector. “Exposure to violence is the number one issue leading to burnout,” says Mike Sagar, health care industry specialist at WorkSafeBC. “When people



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start questioning their safety at work and don't get the post-incident support, morale is bound to drop. There's a psychological and emotional aspect to this issue too. Physical wounds can heal quickly, but the psychological scars can take years." And an industry already suffering significant labour shortages can ill afford to ignore this issue, says Margaret Dhillon, a nurse and spokesperson for the BC Nurses Union. "There are more days lost to violence in this sector than in any other. And the incidence of violence is on the rise."

Indeed, from 2003 to 2007, the number of claims due to violence and force (a subjective term referring to an "unintentional" act of violence not directed at an individual) rose by almost 40 percent."

Who do you think is more likely to be injured by violence on the job?

Garsen Germyn
Hometown - Campbell River

Each year nearly 700 Vancouver Island health care workers are hurt or threatened.

CARE FOR THOSE WHO CARE FOR YOU

Please help us keep a safe health care environment for all.

THE FULL FEBRUARY 2009 ARTICLE IS AVAILABLE ON THE MFLOHC WEBSITE:

[HTTP://WWW.MFLOHC.MB.CA/NEWSLETTER_FOLDER/2009/FEBRUARY_2009_NEWSLETTER.PDF](http://www.mflohc.mb.ca/newsletter_folder/2009/february_2009_newsletter.pdf)

Some of the thoughts from our discussion on this issue:

Employer's gain when they address Workplace Violence.



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They can gain through reduced premium rates for Workers Compensation or other related expenses such as Disability Costs.

There can be a reduction in costs for the Employee Assistance Program or related Stress Leave.

The employer losses when work is not being done or there are increased costs for overtime which is often mandatory. Mandatory overtime increases the risk of more problems and has a definite documented snowball impact on the entire situation.

Program costs are a plus when compared to costs of structural, material damage; loss of productivity, cost of Return To Work programs, costs of mistakes and the Trauma to the victims.

It is vital that there be true management buy in for this or any program to be effective.

Participants shared a range of experiences from very supportive management who were seen as a vital part of the solution to managers who simply pay lipservice.

One of the concerns of the participants is the lack in many areas of Universal standards. The legislation is often very vague and applied very differently in each workplace.

The same issue is true regarding enforcement. One of the Participants provided an example where a government authority had provided the thought that Health and Safety is 90% the responsibility of the individual and only 10% an employer responsibility. This varies greatly from both the official positions held by responsible enforcement arms and government departments. But it does act as a clear example of the problems that Committee members encounter in dealing with issues.

We summarized some of the primary issues that we had discussed.

How do we deal with protection of a vulnerable individual? How can we protect their rights, including privacy while making sure that the workplace does not present a hazard to that individual? At the same time how do we address concerns regarding workload etc. for other individuals that are being impacted by the situation? One clear thought particularly in this regard is that we are not there to resolve all of the employer's problems. Sometimes we need to distinguish resource and staff relations issues as they relate to Health and Safety Concerns. While we are there to help and can often recommend solutions we are not responsible for the employer actions. The employer does not relieve themselves of Due Diligence by passing the problem on to others to resolve.

How do we address the continuing practice of Employers assigning staff to committees? What do we do when they manipulate minutes of meetings, or refuse to adjust minutes to reflect issues brought forward? Simply, many employers see themselves as responsible for running the "joint committee" and we need to get it back from them.



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How do we get employees, including our members, to report near misses/minor injuries particularly during working alone situations? When someone experiences a dangerous issue while alone and fails to report the situation we are unable to work towards solutions.

A related issue that was discussed during the Conference was that we need to recognize that people including our members do not always make rational decisions. We need to recognize and account for the fact that people often act more like Homer Simpson of The Simpson's fame rather than act like Mr. Spock of Star Trek fame. The ideal of a rational person is being soundly questioned in current research. We are not going to change this, but we need to recognize it as a factor. We can't assume others are thinking the same way that we are when it comes to Health and Safety issues.

We have discussed the issues regarding "Blame the Worker" as the premise for understanding all accidents. This basic value remains today as active as ever and as great a problem as ever. The example is that as soon as an injury is reported the first query is "What did you do wrong? Followed by What Could You Have Done to Protect Yourself"? Examples are finger pointing at the victim, while management fails to accept any responsibility.

How do we deal with issues of Harassment, Intimidation, poisonous work environments and how do we fix the situations?

How do we deal with sick individuals coming to work and the employer responsibilities as well as union responsibilities for the individual? This is an issue regarding both the employer responsibility to provide a safe workplace and an individual right to come to work when they feel able to work. The issue of a lack of sick leave can be part of the concern. Bigger issues such as the requirements for quarantine, confidentiality, respect for personal and group rights and individual safety all become part of the response. While H1N1 is the immediate situation this general discussion should be part of an ongoing topic.

None of these issues/problems offer simplistic all inclusive responses that address every permutation of the scenario but by thinking about and a thorough discussion we can hope to be better prepared to discuss with the Employer representatives.

Report on the Group work on addressing workplace issues that were identified during the Conference.

1) How do we actually get the employer to provide committee training?

-Remind the Employer of obligations under Canada Labour Code, such as Due Diligence, Mandatory Training.

-Ensure training requirements are included in Terms of Reference.

-Poll other Departments for other members requiring training so cost sharing may act as an incentive and would lower costs.

-HRSDC complaints?



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-If internal efforts fail ... Political Action (embarrass employer).

2) How do we actually get the employer to provide member/supervisor training in H&S?

-Make the request first to employer thru local OSH Committee or Representative.

-If non-compliant, bump up request to next level. i.e. Policy Committee (Regional or National)

-If still non-compliant report to Labour Officer i.e. HRSDC.

3) What do we do when the employer refuses to do air quality testing, or similar tests?

-Raise at all levels by the OSH Committee.

-Document, leave as a standing item on the agenda and outstanding item on the minutes.

-Refer Regional then National also Departmental channels and via Public Works.

-Third Party testing authority issues.

-Final Step: File complaint with HRSDC.

4) How do we get our members to complete the paperwork for injuries and near misses? Refuse to follow safety procedures etc. etc.

-Communication

*Strong Committee Leadership/Membership.

-Education of Members, Managers

-Activists talk to members.

-Orientation of new members.

-Stories – repercussions with WCB claims of not following reporting procedures.

-Easy access to paperwork needed – Intranet for example.

-Educate people on how to fill out forms, Template examples.

-Explain manager responsibilities in this regard.

-Requires a CULTURE OF SAFETY in the workplace.

-Attention to Safety

-Members reminding Members

-Continuous Reminders, posters, special events (Day of Mourning April 28th) etc.

5) How effective is the “right to refuse” process at accomplishing change in a reasonable timeframe?

-Provides an immediate Safety Net.

-Ineffective if all parties are not involved (Local et al).

-Extremely effective when labor code is enforced.

-Management must implement a Quick Solution.

6) How do we get the “job hazard analysis process completed for each job? And keep it current?

-Be diligent in doing monthly inspections **member expertise to help with inspections.

-Standing item on H&S Committee Meetings and Management Meetings.

-Follow up on deficiencies noted – Not just lip service Canada Labour Code – 30 Days.



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-Internal Complaint resolution process.

7) How do we get anywhere when HRSDC-labour affairs or provincial health and safety officers continually refer back to the internal complaint resolution process and won't get involved?

-It needs to be well documented in order to obtain assistance. We are expected to pursue the Internal Complaint Resolution System to the extent possible and only refer when this has failed.

-Make sure that you have gone through all the appropriate steps in an honest effort to deal with the issues.

-Document in the minutes, refuse to sign incorrect minutes or reports that do not properly reflect the situations involved.

-Refer to every level possible within your structure in an attempt to resolve internally.

-Therefore documentation of steps attempted is crucial when attempting to involve an enforcement part of the system.

8) How do we deal with lip service and passing it up the line on every issue brought to the joint committee?

-Getting management to buy in. The higher the level of buy in the better as long as it is clear throughout the organization.

-By putting a positive spin on it. Such as Employer Cost Savings, Cost Benefit Analysis and Employee Morale.

-Assign a committee to address on-going issues.

-Make sure that you report the number of on-going issues on the annual OHS Report to HRSDC.

-Establish a clear time-line to complete on-going issues.

-If not resolved promptly move up the line. Don't consider closed until the positive response comes back.

-Request assistance from the Labour Affairs Officer to assist in getting on-going issues addressed.

-Have more task sharing (encouraging members to work together).

9) How do we deal with being told "this isn't health and safety" should be dealt with elsewhere? i.e. security, staff relations, EAP etc. etc.

-Choose a Committee member (Chair/Co-Chair) to follow up with the referral.

-The complainant should be provided with name and number of who is responsible for dealing with the issue.

-Ensure that it is recorded in the OSH minutes.

-Identify Timeframe and level of priority.

-Realize that there may be an overlap, but being covered elsewhere doesn't preclude Committee involvement.



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Group work on where do we go from here? who does what? And how does it all fit together?

“Vision of a Health and Safety Council”

- Would like to see Regional Health and Safety committees to be meeting quarterly. Just like Human Rights, and Women’s Committees.
- Possibility of Committees similar to the Area Council Structure.
- To make every employee aware of Health and Safety concerns.
- To make employees aware of all Health and Safety training and conferences.

“Vision of the Future?”

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The Future:

What is our Involvement?

-More local involvement and issues that are compiled Regionally – Nationally to identify trends and future learning needs.

-Regionally – a way for Committee Reps to find resources in their own and other areas.

-On line blog like British Columbia Regional H&S Website –concerns are posted and members respond. Bruce could place link under Prairie Region to our own.

Prairie Region to coordinate a networking, resource system from committee members of Contact info – location – “Position”. On a similar line E-Chart forum, or Expert Panel Q&A.

Look to Tele-Conferences vs. physical meetings to ensure more connection.

More website training could be available such as “Job or Task Hazard Analysis”, “Return to Work” and other topics on demand.

We could post success stories and failures in the hope of obtaining more input and ideas on where to go from here or how to address things differently next time.

Cross training with a variety of departments/agencies/employers or being an observer at a different meeting to learn from how others do things.

One example being the sharing of minutes within and outside your own component, particularly in multi-employer worksites.



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Would like to see something along the idea of an OSH HOTLINE or similar concept.

The development of a Regional Health and Safety Committee structure similar to the Women's Committee Structure, Area Council and other structures within the PSAC.

Handouts could be prepared by the PSAC broken down by department or employer to deal with specific issues until further education is available.

The Regional Website could link to other sources of information.

BOTTOM LINE WE NEED TO END THE ISOLATION, FEELING OF BEING ALONE.

Following the reports on these questions with the responses summarized above a brief rap up was provided.

Brother Bruce Campbell provided some thoughts on the future of the program and hopes for the expansion of Health and Safety within the PSAC. He reminded everyone of his comments the opening evening regarding how far we have come in the changes in attitudes and practices around smoking in the workplace and society overall. Things do not change over night, but with our vigilance they will change.

Brother Clint Wirth provided a perspective related to the Prairie Region Council and did the final wrap up of the Conference. Brother Wirth thanked the PSAC staff for all their work on the Conference from inception to completion. He thanked the Hotel Staff for all their efforts during trying times, from record heat to near freezing temperatures outside, within 24 hours. He recognized the efforts that they had made to make our stay comfortable and adapt to our needs. Brother Wirth also thanked Sister Edith Keefe-Macleod for taking part on the Harassment Committee for this event. Brother Wirth thanked his fellow Prairie Region Council counterparts Rahil Ahmad and Bill Osborne for their work getting this organized and providing valuable input throughout.

Brother Wirth received a hearty round of applause for his great contribution to the success of the event.

At this point we will provide some of the comments without edit, provided by the participants as an overview therefore without responding herein to the concern or comment made.

"It was a good weekend."

"I would like to see the topics compiled beforehand to ensure more information is disseminated."

"The layout of the present conference is good. I want to see the group that is gathered eat Breakfast, dinner and lunch to promote Solidarity."



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“Would like to see an expert panel provided at a future event.”

“The topics were all applicable. All issues have local implications.”

“I really enjoyed the conference because as stated before I enjoy discussing current issues and best practices. I also enjoyed the networking. I now have names of individuals I can contact for help.”

“I would like to see a campaign to assist employees when management wants the employee to stay home, example H1N1.”

“Yes, I really enjoyed this format.”

“Would like to also see some more structured learning for newer members.”

“Yes it was conducive to participatory learning. Excellent!”

“The facilitators of the session did a wonderful job with the tools given.”

“Need more education opportunities better training i.e.)walk through CLC and CLC Part II –Better visibility @ PSAC level.”

“I think that perhaps trying to provide education program to all employer at the same time is doing a disservice to the membership. I personally feel that although the sharing of experiences are a vital part, but if I have concerns that are TB specific or Part II applicable/specific information as it relates to the process.”

“Yes. The collective thinking of the group provided helpful insight to problem solving.”

“It was very useful we the members came up with solutions, not somebody reading from a book or pages.”

“I like the group activities on the actual causes of concern.”

“Yes I am impressed and it gives everyone a chance to address their workplace issues, need to have follow-up on where this sits.”

“This forum was more useful than “lecture” type sessions. I really like the interactive way this one was organized, and how it encouraged individual participation.”

“I am on the fence re: format. I think breakout rooms might have been valuable in this format.”



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“Yes, very useful. Everyone benefits from open forum discussions, especially, those afraid of public speaking.”

“Format of the conference was disappointing as it didn’t seem structured enough – giving more information on hot topics.”

“I’d prefer to be broken down by Province – to talk more specific to provincial regulations and how they may affect some of our buildings (rented spaces).”

“Yes, love the discussion between everyone instead of one person lecturing. How to Improve, keep each speaker at a two minute time limit when they have something to say. Any longer and you lose everyone!!!”

This is a sample of the comments and not meant to be inclusive but in part to illustrate different perceptions that came from the event.

There were a number of facility concerns noted, these do not form part of the report. The comments on the Conference itself are the relevant content for this report. This Report is not the appropriate vehicle to deal with issues regarding the facility. The facility issues are of course being dealt with by the Regional Executive Vice President as they relate to the future use of the facility.

A Collection of Soaps and Toiletries took place on Sunday and these products were forwarded for appropriate charitable use.

REMINDER- THE DEFINITION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY ADOPTED BY THE P.S.A.C.

- 1. The promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers.*
- 2. The prevention among workers of ill-health caused by their working conditions.*
- 3. The protection of workers in their employment from factors promoting ill-health.*
- 4. The placing and maintenance of workers in an occupational environment adapted to their physiological and psychological condition.*

(thought for today)HEALTH AND SAFETY IS LIKE
BREATHING, IF YOU DO NOT DO IT YOU DIE.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Clint Wirth, Prairie Region Council, PSAC
Bill Osborne, Prairie Region Council, PSAC



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Group Photo @ the event

