**Campaign Overview: Florida Gas Transmission and Sunshine 811’s Parade Float in Celebration of National Safe Digging Month**

**Background**

With April 2014 quickly approaching, a thought occurred to a group of Florida Gas Transmission (FGT) employees: large public parades held in Tallahassee, Fla., would provide a festive and engaging way to spread the safe digging message to Floridians at a time of year when digging activity is high. Tallahassee’s 46th Annual Springtime Festival was set to take place during National Safe Digging Month, so a group of FGT employees spearheaded the project of conceptualizing and creating a safe digging-themed float and approached Sunshine 811 about collaborating on the effort. Together, FGT and Sunshine 811 entered their call-before-you-dig float – featuring a vibrant backyard scene with a backhoe preparing to dig into land marked with flags denoting the approximate location of buried utilities – into the parade, and tossed safe digging promotional items to the impressive crowd, reminding them to always call 811 before digging.

**Execution**

FGT recommends the following steps to execute a similar campaign in your area:

* Once you’ve determined which parade you’d like to participate in, **contact the event organizers** to find out necessary details, fees, event rules and reserve a spot. In some cases, float themes, costumes and promotional materials are required to be listed on application and approved in advance by parade organizers.
* **Determine the theme of your float and what resources will be needed for implementation**, including where you will build and store the float until the day of the parade. Be creative to win the attention of attendees and the media.
* **Order supplies and enlist the help of volunteers** to build the float. Be sure to plan for all of the logistical elements of building and transporting the float, such as whether a police escort will be required.
* **Consider throwing 811-themed goodies to parade attendees from the float.** Promotional items that help illustrate the importance of calling 811 and convey damage prevention messages are the best choices for this kind of endeavor.
	+ Check with parade organizers to find out if there are any restrictions on the items that can be distributed during the event. For example, sometimes paper items are banned as handouts.
	+ Take into account the weight of promotional items before ordering. Heavy items are difficult for volunteers to carry throughout the entire parade route. Also consider how volunteers will carry the trinkets. Cross-body bags that volunteers can access easily are a good option.
* **Recruit volunteers to staff the float on the day of the parade and determine what they should wear to highlight the safe digging theme.** Make plans in case of inclement weather and have rain ponchos on-hand for volunteers.
* **Seize local media opportunities before, during and after the parade.** Have two to three simple key messages ready to deliver to reporters about the importance of calling 811 before any digging project. Take advantage of post-event media coverage to expand the reach of your effort. Write articles for company intranet and/or industry publications and newsletters and submit them along with captioned photos.

**Timeline**

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| **Three months prior to event** | Determine the event’s costs and parameters; determine the float theme and assess what resources will be needed to build it. |
| **Two months prior to event** | Order supplies and organize volunteers to help build the float; begin building if possible.  |
| **One month prior to event** | Begin or continue building the float; plan logistical details of getting the float to the parade route and back safely; consider organizing promotional items to be thrown of the float; plan float volunteers’ day-of attire. |
| **One week prior to event** | Alert the media about your float and its important safety message; confirm volunteer day-of staff; create a plan for inclement weather. |

**Results**

Approximately 70,000 people attended Tallahassee’s 46th Annual Springtime Festival and had the chance to see FGT and Sunshine 811’s safe digging float. The float also took home first place and the President’s Award, further highlighting the safe digging message. While the event was not televised, FGT was sure to spread the word about its effort after the event in internal and industry publications. Similar efforts could also include any relevant media impressions, spikes in website traffic and other metrics in their results. For more information about this campaign, contact Gina Greenslate at gina.greenslate@energytransfer.com.





