

Practice Exemplar – SMART SIGNS (Outer Hebrides)

Name and Timescales
SMART SIGNS is a revolutionary concept in safety signage design and is an ongoing pilot initiative in the Outer Hebrides, launched in 2015.
Summary
<p>SMART SIGNS is a multi-agency water safety pilot initiative which the Outer Hebrides Community Partnership (CSP) leads on. Safety signage is positioned at popular freshwater or saltwater shorelines and other high-risk sites like coastal paths and estuaries and is designed to assist people who come into difficulty, with a particular focus on places visitors to the islands go. At the moment signage appears on Eriskay and Barra, with a view to wider installation throughout the islands if funding is received.</p> <p>SMART SIGNS have three innovative elements in addition to the basic warning – they carry a unique Coastguard registered location reference code, they have a full GPS Ordnance Survey map reference for their position, and they feature a smart-phone QR code which takes the user straight to an essential Red Cross First Aid help app when scanned.</p>
Need for Initiative
<p>Through incident reporting data gathered and collated by the Coastguard, it was evident that the majority of people seeking emergency assistance were visitors to the islands, unfamiliar with local knowledge of where it is safe to swim. This was a key driver for the CSP to share local knowledge and promote safety on the islands as widely as possible.</p> <p>Awareness raising materials, such as posters and booklets, were placed at strategic points of entry onto the islands (i.e. ferry ports, vehicle hire companies, accommodation providers, cafes and bars). The creation of SMART SIGNS was a natural progression of this awareness raising work.</p> <p>Another factor which contributed towards identifying a need for the initiative is that a number of locations in the islands have the same name or are better known by local names, which do not appear on a map. If a local person calls the Coastguard for help at one of these locations, it is not guaranteed that the officer on duty will know where they are. Signage with unique identifying numbers ensures they know the exact location.</p>
Aims and Objectives
<p>SMART SIGNS aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inform the public of the inherent dangers of the Hebridean terrain, encouraging them to explore the islands safely.• To support Water Safety Scotland in their aim to reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50% by 2026.• To develop a product template that can be readily accessed and utilised in the development of safety signage in other areas.
Delivery
<p>The CSP, particularly the emergency services members, assess potential SMART SIGNS locations for risk and decide to install them where a specific need is identified. This ensure that signage is placed where it is most needed and in areas where incidents are most likely to occur on the islands.</p>

Successes and Challenges

Successes:

- Seeing an innovative idea come to fruition has been the main success. The initiative has had great support via local and national partners such as RNLI, RoSPA, SCSN and the Scottish Government Cross Party Group on Accident Prevention and Safety Awareness.

Challenges:

- Dedicated funding for the initiative has been a challenge. The ability to expand the initiative wider is dependent on monies being available to produce safety signage. Consideration is being given to applying for sponsorship from relevant organisations where water safety incidents have a financial implication.

Impact/Change

Much of the feedback received at the moment is anecdotal, both from the 26 members of the Community Safety Partnership and individual members of the public. An example of constructive feedback received was that signs warning of quick sand may put people off of visiting beaches altogether and have an adverse effect on tourism. This led to careful consideration of where signs should be installed, ensuring that they were strategically placed in high risk areas that Coastguard data showed that incidents occur whilst being mindful not to completely deter people from visiting beaches and coastal areas. If the initiative is rolled out wider, a full evaluation will take place.

Reflections

The concept for SMART SIGNS could be easily adapted and rolled out nationally, however this could require substantial buy in from a national partner. The financial implications of producing safety signage are a barrier to wider roll out. However it is felt that there is real potential to roll out the concept throughout Scotland. This could also be supported by developing a pre-school education opportunity and practical intervention to familiarise children with safety signage symbols from a young age.

The initiative has also reinforced what was already known – that partnership working towards a common goal, community engagement and continuous evaluation are key in achieving success.

Support received from national organisations and individuals who believed in what the initiative is aiming to achieve has been encouraging. For example, a professional graphic designer, who had worked on Perth's Safe Tay initiative, contacted the CSP offering to further develop SMART SIGNS signage.

Additional Information

<https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/emergencies-safety-and-crime/community-safety/smart-signs/>

Author and Contact Details

Frank Creighton
Social and Community Services Policy Officer
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Sacred Heart House
South Uist
HS8 5SS
fpreighton@cne-siar.gov.uk
T: 01870 604 985
M: 07826511183