

Milk Carton Panels

How would you like to hear ... “Sure, we’ll be happy to run the Corps’ water safety art on the side panel of our milk cartons? Which size carton do you want it to appear on? And, when do you want the message to run?”

“Has this happened before?” you might be asking yourself. The answer is yes. Department of Army and HQUSACE even gave one District approval to sign an agreement with International Paper Company -- America’s largest milk carton producer -- to print water safety messages on any or all of its 440 companies’ side panels in 1988.

Can you obtain permission from a local milk company to print water safety art on its side panels? Sure you can. Here are a few suggestions on how to go about it.

Head for the local grocery store, with pen and paper. Jot down the different milk companies’ addresses. Get the telephone numbers from the information operator if the company is not in your telephone directory. Call for an appointment and with camera-ready milk carton art head for the meeting.

Remember the one reason you are there, to save lives on the waterways. And, just maybe the milk carton person will give you permission to run side panels ... FREE!

Make sure you know what size you want the messages on. The half-pint Eco-Pak is the smallest carton, then the pint, quart and half-gallon. The Eco-Paks and pints are great for April through early June as they are distributed in schools. The quarts and half-gallons are good for home use all year.

Next, when do you want the panels to run? Back up your appoint time at least six months. Start between Columbus Day and Thanksgiving Day in order to get them out

in April. Probably you want the school kids to see the message just before they get out for the summer. Then, if possible, try to obtain the pints, quarts and half-gallons for the three killer weekends (Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day). If your lake has cold, harsh winters, you might also want to really push for hypothermia panels.

It is so important to meet the person face-to-face. Many times the Director of Public Relations is a good person to start with. Again, believe it or not, an excellent time to meet the milk carton rep is after a drowning or boating fatality. Take a copy of the accident news clipping; it will set the tone. Another tone-setter is a milk carton example from another state.

Put on that beautiful smile and get ready to provide a good ol’ Corps of Engineers handshake. Keep your presentation short and to the point. Once the milk rep says “okay”, pause for a moment. Is this a good time to ask for additional cartons for additional months? Yes, probably 90 percent of the time, but you will be the on-the-spot judge.

Ensure the representative jots down the dates in the master schedule and you do the same. You might ask, “How many milk cartons do you suppose will have the water safety message?” This is always good information to have available.

Also, ask the person to telephone you when the water safety cartons arrive so you can work your publicity magic. For example, how about getting a reporter to cover the President of the milk company or the Director of PR and your boss inspecting the first carton as it comes off the conveyer?

In addition, you will want to send some to District and upward, so request empty samples. Maybe get some formed and some unformed (flat). Use the formed cartons for

display purposes and the unformed ones to mail. Your samples might help another person. Remember to take photos for internal and external news releases, and presentations. Again, we shouldn't forget the District newsletter. Always send a tear sheet (news clipping) back to the milk person. It will pay dividends. You might want to do the same panel project next year, and the next.

Let's say the milk company representative says "yes." Here's another approach to expanding your coverage, but you must be very, very careful about knowing when to use this method. Ask the milk rep if he or she knows any other milk company who might also help you. Probably the best time to suggest this is after your first cartons roll off the conveyer. Or, when you take some news clippings back to the person. Don't be overanxious, but remember, each situation will be different. If the rep is in a hurry, delay your request. If the person is unhappy, delay your request. If, however, the individual is happy and says something like, "It sure has been a pleasure working with you, is there anything else I can do?" Pause, then add something like, "Now that you mention it, do you know of any other milk company, anywhere, that might help us spread the water safety word?" You might be surprised.

Also, for your information, many, many local milk companies do not produce cartons. Therefore, after you've been successful the first time, you might ask the local milk company representative to work with you to obtain the permission of a milk carton producer or larger milk company. It is possible because the Nashville District, with the help of Purity Dairy in Nashville, had its water safety theme selected by International Paper Company for 1988. The request was forwarded to the Ohio River Division, endorsed to USACE and then over to DA.

Some might ask, "Doesn't the water safety milk carton slick, with the Corps logo, say, 'The Corps of Engineers says buy Betty the Cow brand milk?'"

Your quick, professional answer is, "No. It says wear your life jacket, not buy Betty the Cow brand milk. We are trying to save lives on the waterways any way we possibly can, with little funds. Do you know of a way to help us save lives on the lake? We need

all the help we can get."

Remember, what do most Americans start their mornings off with? Milk. And, your water safety message might get some families started to the lake ... thinking safety. Wouldn't that be great?

It's a wonderful feeling seeing your first milk carton on the store shelves. Good luck with your smile and milk carton panel project.