

1 Billion 274 Million Steps for a Heart-Warming Cause

“I walked, I jogged, I crawled, I even did jumping jacks around the kitchen table!”

November 2012- More than 4,000 people from 52 of Ireland’s largest workplaces took an amazing 1 billion 274 million steps as part of the Smarter Travel Workplaces ‘Pedometer Challenge’. The Challenge ran for four weeks, ending on the 9th of October last and was organised by the National Transport Authority in partnership with the Irish Heart Foundation, to encourage people to walk for health and for the commute.

Gerry Murphy, CEO of the National Transport Authority commented: “It is great to see so many organisations taking part in the Pedometer Challenge again this year. The Pedometer Challenge encourages employees to increase their activity at every opportunity including being active as they travel on the commute, during the working day and outside of work. It is fantastic to see those walking to and from work more than triple during the event, with most intending to continue this beyond the challenge. We are delighted to run this challenge in partnership with the Irish Heart Foundation, and to raise funds to support their work.”

The winning teams overall in the Pedometer Challenge 2012 were ‘Funky Feet’ from Cork University Hospital in first place, ‘Bad Ass Baldies and the Cure’ from ESB in second place and ‘The Jolly Walkers’ from the National Rehabilitation Hospital in third place.

A draw was conducted from among the top 10 teams to find two winners for a place each on the Irish Heart Foundation’s European Walk in 2013. The winners chosen were Maria Carmody from Leo Pharma and Pat Casey from Cork City Council and courtesy of the Irish Heart Foundation they will be taking part in their overseas walk in Croatia next year.

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The 'Best Workplace Awards' went to 'Capita' and 'Siemens Limited' for being the workplaces with the highest percentage uptake among staff in the Pedometer Challenge.

Mr Barry Dempsey, Chief Executive of the Irish Heart Foundation commented: "We are delighted to be involved in the Pedometer Challenge again this year, it is a great workplace initiative to encourage and support people to get active. The national recommendation for adults is 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on five days of the week or more. Active commuting is a great way to get hearts pumping and to help more adults reach this target."

Many smaller spot prizes were also awarded throughout the challenge to acknowledge efforts made and to motivate participants.

Participating companies included Accenture, Beaumont Hospital, Citi, Cork City Council, ESB, Capita, IKEA, Siemens Limited, Rabobank in Ireland, Leo Pharma, Mount Carmel Hospital, Microsoft, University College Dublin, Symantec, Pfizer and Trinity College Dublin.

During the four-week challenge, teams 'virtually' stepped to warmer climates including Lake Como, Cannes, Hawaii, New York City and Long Island Beach, USA. Those walking to work in the participating companies more than tripled, with participants also fundraising for the Irish Heart Foundation as they walked, raising over €5,000 through pedometer sales.

Participants were encouraged to walk all or part of the way to and from work and to swap short car journeys for walking, to help clock up steps for their teams. Many found the challenge really motivated them to get moving and reap a variety of benefits. One participant said "the biggest kick I get is racing the cars which are bumper to bumper around Inchigaggin bridge, Cork ... what I had not factored in was my new hour glass figure which I can now clothe with the petrol money I have saved. " Anne Barrett, Cork University Hospital.

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For another participant the challenge had an effect on many aspects of her health “I gave up the ciggies at the start of the challenge and the extra walking has really helped me focus on a much healthier lifestyle. I walk home every evening (3+ miles) and I also go for a walk with my fellow ‘vixens’ at lunchtime.” Ann Wright, ‘Vivacious Vixens’ team, University Hospital Galway.

For others the challenge gave them the gentle push and incentive they needed to get active “A plan soon formed- drink more water and use the furthest away bathroom when needed, emails & phone calls to colleagues in my building were replaced by a more personal touch with me ‘stepping’ to see them instead. Of course I ‘stepped’ while talking to them as well which must have caused a degree of mild amusement. Spurred on by our Team Captain I moved at every opportunity... walking after work was not an impossible task and so that is what I did. I walked, I ‘jogged’, I crawled, I did jumping jacks around the kitchen table.” Eibhlin Cassidy, Cork City Council.

One participant is thrilled with the positive impact the Challenge has had on her life. “The Pedometer Challenge proved that by taking some break to go for jogs, by walking rather than driving, made my life less stressful and more enjoyable. Walking with kids to the shop added more conversation with them, more discovery about their day, more laughter, more holding hands, more time to spend with each other.” Izumi Cullen, IBM.

Another example of the dedication of participants to the challenge is the ‘Legs and Go’ team from the National University of Ireland, Galway who attended a wedding during the challenge and decided to accessorise their dresses with their pedometers and dance the night away!

Over 90% of coordinators from participating workplaces commented that the Pedometer Challenge had positive effects on team building and team spirit in their workplace. They also commented that the challenge raised awareness of activity levels, encouraged staff to walk to work and increased stair use. Coordinators also cited improved staff morale and stress reduction as other benefits of participating in the Pedometer Challenge.

For more information, contact Caroline Cullen, Communications Manager, Irish Heart Foundation, Tel: 01 6346908 Mob: 086-6049282

Editor's Notes:

The Smarter Travel Workplaces Programme is implemented by the National Transport Authority with funding from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The programme is aimed at large employers (over 250 employees) seeking to develop Workplace Travel Plans. Workplace Travel Plans have been shown internationally to reduce single occupancy car use on the commute by between 10% and 25%. Workplace Travel Plans also reduce costs associated with parking, business travel, fleet, CO2 emissions, absenteeism, and access issues. Further information on the programme and Partners can be found at www.smartertravelworkplaces.ie.

Further information on the Pedometer Challenge 2012 can be found here –

<http://www.smartertravelworkplaces.ie/index.php>

Participating workplaces

Accenture, Airtricity, An Bord Pleanála, Aramark Ireland, Arup, Atkins, Beaumont Hospital, Bord Gáis Networks, Capita, Children's University Hospital Temple Street, Citi, Cork City Council, Cork University Hospital, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Dublin City Council, Dunlaoghaire Rathdown County Council, Eircom Group, Eirgrid, ESB, Galway City Council, IADT, IBM, IKEA, Irish Dairy Board, KBC Bank, Leo Pharma, Mater Hospital, Microsoft, Mount Carmel Hospital, National Rehabilitation Hospital, National Transport Authority, National Treasury Management Agency, NUI Galway, Oracle, Pfizer, Rabobank in Ireland, Roughan & O' Donovan, Railway Procurement Agency, RPS, Shell, Siemens, South Dublin County Council, St. Michael's Hospital, St. Vincent's Hospital, Symantec, Telefónica Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, UCC, UCD, University Hospitals Galway, Veolia Transport Dublin Light Rail Ltd, Waterford County Council and Waterford IT.

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Caption for press photo:

Winning steppers, Maria Carmody from Leo Pharma and Pat Casey from Cork City Council! Maria and Pat took part in the Pedometer Challenge 2012 organised by the National Transport Authority in partnership with the Irish Heart Foundation, to encourage people to walk for health and for the commute. Maria and Pat won of the Irish Heart Foundation sponsored prize and will be participating in their overseas walk in Croatia in 2013.