Cannes Lions Introduces Safe Zones Staffed by Trained Professionals

Cannes Lions has introduced three dedicated Safe Zones, which will be staffed by trained professionals from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 a.m., 22 hours per day, during the festival, its DEI chief Frank Starling told ADWEEK.

From June 16-20, the confidential spaces will operate inside the main venue at Palais des Festivals, Pantiero Terrace (near to the Cannes Lions registration space), and at La Roseraie park at the opposite side of the Croisette. They will be open to anyone who "feels uncomfortable, in need of support," or wants advice from safeguarding professionals.

Their introduction follows several women speaking out about their experiences of sexual harassment and assault at the 2024 Cannes Lions event, which drew more than 12,000 delegates from 94 countries.

Organizers did not state whether the new safeguarding measures were directly related, but Starling said they had "evolved through active listening, feedback, and collaboration."

Reports of such incidents included two U.S. undergraduate students telling ADWEEK they had filed a report with Cannes police accusing a U.S. ad industry contractor of sexual assault. They said their encounter happened in the garden of the Carlton Hotel in the early hours.

In another account, Dagmar Bennett, TV documentary and partnerships director at underrepresented talent initiative Brixton Finishing School, wrote in Campaign that a senior male business associate asked her if she would exchange sex for

money.

Changes were made based on input from the festival's Community Safeguarding Committee, said Starling. This year, the group included industry anti-harassment initiative TimeTo, Brixton Finishing School, and Women in Advertising and Communications Leadership's (WACL) Empower Cafe, among others.

"The Festival should be a place where everyone feels welcome and safe. That's why we're continuing to work hand-in-hand with our delegates, partners, communities, and local authorities, creating an environment where everyone feels respected and included," said Starling.

In addition to these changes, organizers will bring greater visibility to numerous "alert buttons" installed by the City of Cannes by including their precise locations in the official Cannes Lions Festival app and its inclusivity guide, per Starling.

These inconspicuous and easily accessible alarms were implemented in 2015, with more added in 2021. The systems are equipped with a camera and a microphone and are directly connected to Cannes police.

The closest buttons to the festival action are in front of the Palais steps; at the entrance to the SNCF train station; on Place Roubaud in La Bocca; and at Macé beach.

Cannes Lions Safe Zone triage process

"We're proud to be working with trusted partners to ensure everyone can participate in the Festival free from unwanted attention," Starling said. He explained that a "clear triage system" will be implemented at Safe Zones to determine relevant next steps and support for delegates.

Once an incident is reported, professionals have three options based on its severity: offer counsel; work with on-site

festival security to help manage the situation appropriately and discreetly; or involve local authorities if the matter needs escalating.

As in previous years, Cannes organizers will collaborate with partners on a dedicated anti-harassment campaign that will launch during the festival and run across its key venues and media.

In 2024, TimeTo and Cannes Lions partnered to launch Celebrating Safely, a guide providing advice and education on sexual harassment for all festival attendees.

This year, Starling said the campaign will encourage delegates and partners to consider their "own behavior and the impact it can have on others."

"We're asking everyone to pause, reflect, intervene safely, and take responsibility for creating a respectful, inclusive experience for all," he explained.

Bystander intervention training

In the run-up to Cannes Lions, TimeTo will deliver dedicated bystander intervention training, available to all. Starling said information on this training will be provided to delegates ahead of the event.

"We want our community to feel empowered to safely and effectively intervene if they witness inappropriate behavior," Starling said. "By offering this, we hope to educate participants on how to identify problematic situations, choose appropriate intervention strategies, and support those affected so that collectively, we can create a festival environment where everyone feels safe, respected, and supported."

The two students who shared their experiences with ADWEEK in 2024 described being groped and told to accept men's

“forwardness,” in full view of other people. However, they said no one seemed to notice, as everyone was in their own “bubbles.”

At the time, the women said they shared their experiences to spur more “safety and accountability” for women and students at the festival.

This year, Cannes Lions is under new ownership following events and services business Informa’s $1.6 billion purchase of parent company Ascential.

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