

SunSmart Councils – Example submission

Dovedale Cancer Control Network Submission to the Dovedale District Council on the matter of a sun protection policy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a submission to the Dovedale District Council by Jane Smith on behalf of the Dovedale Cancer Control Network. This submission requests council implement a sun protection policy covering outdoor summer events, outdoor workers, parks and gardens, swimming and paddling pools, other outdoor facilities (eg, camping grounds), and planning and building approvals.

It outlines the reasons why such a policy would be of benefit to the people in our community. In short, we believe such a policy would help to raise awareness of the risks of harmful exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR), reduce the incidence of skin cancer in the region, and provide a more supportive environment for those wishing to protect themselves from the sun during the months of high UVR. A sun protection policy would contribute to a number of the community outcomes outlined in the Dovedale District Council's long-term council community plan and district annual plan (see below).

ABOUT THOSE MAKING THIS SUBMISSION

The Dovedale Cancer Control Network is a group of health promoters from the Dovedale District and includes representatives from the Dovedale District Health Board, Dovedale Primary Health Organisation, Dovedale Cancer Society and Plunket. The Cancer Control Network's aim is to reduce the rates of melanoma and other skin cancers in the Dovedale region caused by harmful exposure to the sun.

REASONS FOR A SUN PROTECTION POLICY

Skin Cancer in New Zealand: Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the country, with New Zealanders at high risk of developing a skin cancer during their lifetime. Each year there are an estimated 69,000 or more new cases of skin cancer and over 300 New Zealanders die from the disease.

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer and New Zealand has one of the highest melanoma death rates in the world. In 2005, the year for which the most recent figures are available, there were 2,017 recorded cases of melanoma (<http://www.cancernz.org.nz/reducing-your-cancer-risk/sunsmart/about-skin-cancer/costs-of-skin-cancer/>).

At the time of this submission, there are two skin cancer diagnoses a day, with one a month being melanoma, in the Dovedale region. The vast majority of skin cancers are preventable at all ages if people avoid excess exposure to UVR and if attitudes towards tanning are changed.

Decisions made by council frequently impact on the health of our community. Melanoma and other skin cancers are serious public health problems for which local government needs to assume some responsibility. Long-term and sustainable sun protection practices will have an impact on the future health of Dovedale residents.

The *New Zealand Cancer Control Strategy: Action Plan 2005-2010* stated that skin cancer prevention strategies need to target both the individual and appropriate organisations. Such organisations include early childhood centres, schools, sporting and recreational organisations, and local government.

The *Cancer Control Strategy* highlighted that while there has been an emphasis on raising awareness of the need for sun protection among individuals through media campaigns, there is also a need for public policy for skin cancer control. One of its key areas of focus is increasing the provision of shade in public areas and settings.

The introduction of a sun protection policy has at its core the aim of reducing the number of skin cancer cases by raising awareness of the issue in the community, and offering the best possible opportunities for people to practice sun protective behaviours. Studies looking at factors that affect skin cancer show that:

- most skin cancers are considered to be caused by excess exposure to sun UVR, and are therefore potentially largely preventable
- New Zealand experiences high levels of UVR between September and March. Levels can be up to 40 percent higher than those at equivalent latitudes in the Northern Hemisphere
- people are particularly at risk from harmful exposure to UVR between September and March when peak UVR levels exceed those when sun protection is recommended.'
- episodes of sunburn have been associated with increased risk of melanoma

- the encouragement of sun-protective behaviour is the most effective public health measure to reduce the incidence of skin cancer
- appropriately placed shade provides good protection from harmful exposure to UVR and can reduce exposure to UVR if available as a choice for individuals
- shade audits are an effective means of determining how outdoor spaces can be used and, if necessary, modified to minimise the risk of over-exposure to UVR
- clothing and hats provide a natural shield for the skin, and use of a broad spectrum, SPF30+ broad spectrum sunscreen provides extra protection. Wrap-around sunglasses will protect the eyes by filtering out the harmful rays.

What benefit is there to the Dovedale District Council in having a sun protection policy?

A sun protection policy gives the council an opportunity to promote a healthier community and shows it believes safety is important for those using its parks, reserves and swimming pools. It creates a healthy environment in the district's recreation areas and gives Dovedale District Council the chance to play a large part in educating people on how to stay safe in the sun.

An increasing number of organisations are recognising the need to provide shade, and as the community's knowledge about sun protection improves, so does its demand for public facilities with adequate seasonally appropriate shade. Sun protection practices also further a number of community outcomes relating to health, wellbeing, recreation and the environment.

Skin cancer has a number of impacts on the wellbeing of communities. Dovedale District Council will be investing in reducing skin cancer to save both human suffering and health expenditure. The Dovedale district offers a range of fantastic sporting facilities and top range playgrounds. Wouldn't it be great to ensure residents and visitors can enjoy these facilities in the safest possible environment?

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

We believe that a sun protection policy covering all relevant council activities will help to further the following community outcomes listed in the Dovedale long-term council community plan (LTCCP) and the Dovedale draft annual plan.

- LTCCP Community Outcome 4.2: The community is safe, healthy and strong.
- LTCCP Community Outcome 5.7: People of all ages, cultures and abilities enjoy recreation, cultural and leisure activities.
- LTCCP Community Outcome 6.1: ...a region that provides a safe, healthy and friendly place to work, live or visit.
- Dovedale Draft Annual Plan Outcome 5.3: Development and positive management of existing recreational and sports facilities.
- Dovedale Draft Annual Plan Outcome 7.10: Community participation in the decision-making process.

- Dovedale Draft Annual Plan Outcome 8.2: Environmental design is highlighted as an important issue.
- Dovedale Draft Services Management Plan: Joint projects with other groups or agencies where there are mutual goals or a significant benefit to the community.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE ELSEWHERE?

Horowhenua District Council and Wanganui District Council have implemented generic sun protection policies successfully and with little cost involved. Sun protection practices for outdoor workers, outdoor events and beaches have also been implemented in places such as Wellington, Christchurch, New Plymouth and Nelson. Internationally, the City of Whittlesea, Australia has had a shade policy in place since 1999 for which it has received a health award.

In all cases, the practices have been seen as successful in terms of raising awareness of the risks of UVR exposure and, in some cases, saving lives. This has been demonstrated in New Zealand where sun protection practices put in place by Christchurch City Council resulted in a far higher awareness of sun protection issues amongst council staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that:

1. The council offers protection from harmful exposure to UVR by taking action in the following areas.

Outdoor events

- Develop a SunSmart outdoor events policy which includes consideration of timing of events, shade provision, role-modelling by officials and promotion of SunSmart behaviours at all council run or contracted events. Promote this to all community groups using council facilities.
- Where possible, schedule outdoor events, such as parades and festivals, at times when the risks of harmful exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) are low (usually before 11am and after 4pm between September to March when peak UVR levels exceed those when sun protection is recommended).
- Provide information, appropriately placed shade provision, and appropriate personal sun protection such as sunscreen, at all council-run outdoor events.

Outdoor workers

- Develop a council SunSmart outdoor workers policy in line with the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. This would include provision of SunSmart clothing, sunscreen, appropriately placed shade, scheduling of work and a commitment to SunSmart behaviour.
- Work with Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) to encourage employers to undertake appropriate monitoring to safeguard the health of employees exposed to high UVR levels.

Parks and gardens

- Look for opportunities to provide sufficient natural or man-made shade structures where regular activities take place during times of high UVR levels.
- Conduct shade audits of all parks over time, prioritising those where new facilities or other upgrading is being planned.

Swimming pools, paddling pools and other outdoor facilities

- Provide shading options, appropriate personal sun protection and information to public.
- Conduct shade audits of all swimming pools and other outdoor facilities over time, prioritising those where new facilities or other upgrading is being planned.

Planning and building approvals

- Introduce and implement a universal policy requiring all relevant departments and public facilities to include appropriately placed shade, or take advantage of existing shade as an essential component when designing and developing outdoor facilities and settings.
- Ensure shade development is incorporated into all council environmental plans – this includes all council-managed facilities such as housing, parks, playgrounds and street scenes.
- Ensure shade auditing is a requirement of all new external developments which council permits.
- Provide information about planning and designing quality shade, or contact details of shade audit professionals, with planning application kits.
- Outdoor planners to carry out regular shade audits of public places and to keep up-to-date with current shade practices.
- Amend planning guidelines to reflect these changes.

2. The public is made aware of the risks of UVR and encouraged to make use of any sun protection measures made available to them. Including:
 - community grants to outdoor groups, such as sports bodies, to include provisions about SunSmart behaviour
 - information on sun protection practices to be promoted to both employees and community members to raise awareness of the risks of skin cancer
 - reminders about the need to minimise exposure to the sun, usually between 11am and 4pm (during the September to March period, during which peak UVR levels exceed those when sun protection is recommended) to be placed at swimming pools, and announcements made over public address systems.

3. Council use publicity to inform the public of the sun protection provisions and encourage use of these provisions.

We thank you for your time and wish to be heard in support of this submission.

Jane Smith
On behalf of Dovedale Cancer Control Network.

References:

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