

SunSmart Councils

Horowhenua District Council success story

Background

Horowhenua District Council adopted a generic sun protection policy in 2001 after its parks manager attended a SunSmart awareness and training session organised by the Cancer Society and featuring John Greenwood, an Australian shade expert. The majority of the council's sun protection policy relates to public outdoors areas, contractors and council staff.



Parks and Property Supervisor Mick Longley at Jubilee Park, Levin

The policy was driven by a champion within the council and assisted by other members of council staff as well as health promoters from the Cancer Society. Since the adoption of the policy, a number of practices have been employed by the council in order to meet the policy's requirements, including:

1. Outdoor workers – ensuring staff awareness of sun protection, wide-brimmed hats provided, contract managers have attended a council-organised SunSmart training day
2. Parks and gardens – strategic tree planting for shade provision
3. Swimming and paddling pools – at the council's only outdoor pool, umbrellas are provided as well as free sunscreen
4. Planning and building approvals – a tree-planting scheme in public open spaces ensures trees are planted three to four years prior to the creation of any outdoor areas. Council staff members also work closely with cafe owners who have outdoor areas to encourage them to incorporate shade provision
5. Council staff – free wide-brimmed sunhats have been provided for all staff members of Horowhenua District Council.

Implementation

Horowhenua District Council's sun protection policy was championed by the parks manager who attended a SunSmart awareness and training session held by the Cancer Society. Through taking part in this event, he immediately saw that improved sun protection could be achieved without having huge implications in terms of workload and budget. He raised with the council's chief executive the possible development and implementation of a sun protection policy.

SunSmart workshop

After consulting with the council's chief executive, a SunSmart workshop was arranged to raise awareness of the issue internally. The entire council was invited to attend, along with relevant staff members, a representative from the regional sports trust, school principals, school Board of Trustees' members and contracting managers commissioned by the council to undertake outdoor work. The council received positive feedback about the workshop session. As a result of the workshop's success, the parks manager was given the go-ahead to develop a sun protection policy.

Initial responses

Initial responses to the idea of a sun protection policy were extremely positive. The chief executive of Horowhenua District Council was enthusiastic about raising awareness internally and the council was open to making changes to its district plan. Outdoor contractors employed by the council also reacted positively and were happy to build relationships over the issue. Both council and contractors agreed on the significance of sun protection and on what should be done to protect workers from the sun.

Development of policy

Web-based research was undertaken around the topic of sun protection. The parks manager also liaised with the Cancer Society, landscape architects, and other council staff members to develop the sun protection policy.

The policy was designed to complement the council's long-term council community plan (LTCCP). It relates directly to the council's health and wellbeing goals of making the district an enjoyable, safe place where people can make the most of the outdoors and recreational opportunities.

Policy adoption by council

A draft sun protection policy was presented to council members and a discussion on the policy's implications took place. It was accepted that the proposal was both practical and affordable, and the Horowhenua District Council passed a resolution in December 2001.

Resolved: "That council's potential role in this matter as consent authority be further investigated.

That council undertake a shade audit when upgrading any facility and make proper provision as part of that upgrade.

That council ensures that shade is included in the consideration of all new facilities."

Policy objectives

At the time the policy was developed, and then adopted, the main aim was to construct a solid foundation for increasing sun protection in the Horowhenua region, and to strengthen the council's practices over time. More specifically the policy outlined the following objectives:

- *to ensure that the provision of shade is an integral part of council's planning processes*
- *to seek to increase the provision of shade at council-owned parks, playgrounds and facilities*
- *to seek to increase the provision of shade at sporting and recreation facilities*
- *to seek to increase the provision of shade by private developers*
- *to seek to increase the provision of shade by private homeowners through education and promotion of shade concepts.*

Budget

No budget was allocated to the development of Horowhenua District Council's sun protection policy. The costs were simply the time put in by the council's parks manager – a matter of a few weeks.

Promotion

Although there was no official launch of the sun protection policy, it has been promoted in various ways since its implementation in 2001.

The council-organised workshop was the first attempt to raise awareness both internally and within the community. In addition to this, the council ran an internal awareness campaign, which involved emailing and talking, to staff face-to-face about sun protection. Staff members working on the design of outdoor areas were provided with a software programme (WebshadePRO), a tool designed to develop appropriate shade solutions when planning the construction of outdoor areas. The council also invited the Cancer Society to talk at the national park managers' conference.

It was acknowledged that raising public awareness was a vital element of increasing sun protection practices. With this in mind, sunscreen was provided for both staff and customers in the council's reception foyer. The council also distributed Cancer Society posters and stickers to schools around the region.

Media coverage

When wide-brimmed hats were approved for all council staff, a local media campaign was undertaken. Council staff members were photographed together wearing the hats and the story received good coverage in regional newspapers.

Evaluation

Horowhenua District Council aims to develop its sun protection policy on a strategic level. Planning has been a key element in the success of the council's sun protection measures.

What worked well

One of the council's biggest successes was the continuous involvement of both staff and council members in the development and implementation of the sun protection policy. Raising awareness within the council through the council organised SunSmart workshop was an invaluable part of the process. A great deal of effort was made in communicating the positive nature of the policy and enabling interested parties to contribute to it.

The planning and planting of trees in advance of the construction of outdoor spaces – such as car parks and playgrounds – has also been a success. With the help of experts such as landscape architects, strategic sites are identified and by the time the construction begins, medium to large trees are already providing shade. The council's commitment to the ongoing necessity and development of shade protection has also contributed to the success of its policy.

Cancer Society health promoters observed that the commitment of a 'champion' within the council really drove the project from the outset, right through to its implementation.

What could have worked better?

The timeframe in which changes have been made has been approximately seven years. During this time, no re-evaluation of the policy has taken place and the council acknowledges that it is time to do so. Although the council has been proactive in delivering sun protection, regular re-evaluation of sun protection practices has not occurred due to lack of time, resources and large workloads.

It is also noted that more thorough long-term planning with the involvement of the Planning Team from the outset would have been advantageous. The Planning Team are the ones who drive changes to the District and Strategic Plans.

Future plans

For the future, the council is considering constructed shelters for outdoor spaces, and is currently in the process of planting trees for shade protection in council-owned car parks. It also intends to increase links with the wider community in terms of sun protection, eg, further work with private enterprises when the council is planning outdoor areas.

Suggestions

The following suggestions for TLAs intending to develop or extend a sun protection policy came from key team members at Horowhenua District Council and Cancer Society health promoters.

- A well-planned, simple policy means it isn't necessary to spend lots of time and money to achieve a positive effect on the community.
- At the very least look at strategic planting of trees, and build-in further practices over time.
- Embrace the community and get people involved as much as possible. There are always people out there who are passionate enough to help push the message, sponsor events etc.
- Be proactive in promoting the benefits of sun protection, and of health and recreation in general, in the community.
- Integrate sun protection into council planning. Sun protection has to be well considered from the very beginning of a project if the final result is to be effective.