

SunSmart Councils – Implementing the policy

Phase two project plan

Congratulations, the council has agreed to adopt a sun protection policy! Now you move into phase two of the project – implementation.

For this stage you will need to update your project plan to focus on implementation. The updated plan will have a strong focus on the tasks that need to be undertaken to support the introduction of the policy (such as raising staff awareness of the issue, incorporating sun protection into planning and building approvals etc), evaluation of the policy, as well as a plan for communicating the new policy to the public and key stakeholders.

Raise awareness of the issue

Your sun protection policy will be most successful if as many people as possible within the council and the community understand why it is needed. Encourage and assist the council in organising a SunSmart awareness and training session – this can really help to raise the profile of the issue. Invite local councillors and relevant council staff, for example, health and safety managers and parks managers. Other people on the guest list could include representatives from other regional councils, council contractors and managers of local recreational facilities.

Collaboration

A sun protection policy will work best if there is an organisation-wide commitment to it. Encourage the set up of an inter-departmental working group within the council. This will be made up of staff from each department who have a stake in the policy, and may also have a representative from an organisation such as the Cancer Society or local building and landscape architects. Make sure all the goals and actions set out in the policy are simple and achievable for those whose job it will be to implement them.

Evaluation

Evaluating the new policy will give you a gauge of what is working well and where the policy may need refinement. It is important to think about evaluation of the policy from the outset of the implementation process. A 'baseline' survey prior to the introduction of the policy will allow you to monitor the changes brought about by the policy. For more information see *Evaluating the policy*.

Working with the media

Communicating the new policy to the public is a big part of the awareness-raising that will be vital to the policy's success. Ensure at least one person in your team is in charge of promotion of the policy. Ideally, this will be someone with previous media or communications experience. This person can make sure media releases are well written and can call local reporters to encourage them to cover the launch of the policy. Find out which media are most highly read/watched/listened to in your area, and target these as a priority.

Develop simple, clear information

To ensure those supporting the introduction of a sun protection policy are communicating the same information, develop a list of key messages and frequently-asked questions. These will enable all the information and research relevant to the initiative to be gathered in one place. This information can form the basis for media articles and releases, information flyers, information for school newsletters, letters to the editor and so on.

Develop relationships with the media

The media is always on the lookout for stories with a local flavour. Keep reporters at your local newspapers and radio stations up-to-date with statistics, and progress on the development and implementation of a sun protection policy. Provide local reporters with succinct and accurate key messages about the reasons behind the sun protection measures.

Think like a journalist

Journalists often get inundated with people wanting publicity for their cause so when you approach them, it's important to make sure your issue sparks their interest. The first thing to remember is that the media thrive on dramatic statistics, and these should be one of the first things to highlight when trying to gain coverage of your story.

'Real life' stories are also an effective way to get the media interested in an issue. If you know of anyone willing to speak out in support of the policy who has had first-hand experience of skin cancer, this will immediately appeal to journalists, giving the story a human face. This strategy can also be used in ongoing promotion of the policy.

A good example of this is when an outdoor worker from Christchurch City Council – when taking part in their free annual skin checks – was found to have melanoma. Her mole was subsequently removed which may have saved her life. This story was promoted within council publications but it would also have been a great opportunity to get publicity in local media. Make the most of every chance to raise awareness in the public arena.

Media releases and letters to the editor

Talk to local supporters such as DHB staff, or health promoters, to see if they are able to help by writing supportive letters to the editor of your local newspaper, or by putting out a supportive media release. The letters page in the local newspaper is widely read

and a collection of letters will make it clear to the council that there is support for sun protection practices.

If your group puts out a media release, follow up with a phone call to local media to check they received the release and to ask if they need any more information. Taking the time to do this will increase your chance of gaining media coverage. And don't just stick to local media – regional and national media often cover local stories. Don't be afraid to send media releases to the major daily paper that covers your area – you might just get lucky! Likewise, you never know when television news is looking for a 'quirky' local story, so consider contacting them as well. SunSmart stories are ideal 'fillers' for the weather segment of the television news. You can usually find newsroom contact details or information on how to submit news items at the organisations' websites.

When putting out a release, try to provide a photo opportunity that could be used to support your story and mention this in your correspondence or when you call. An example of this was when all Horowhenua District council staff were provided with wide-brimmed sunhats. The council informed their local newspaper and were photographed outside the council buildings wearing the hats. As a result they received positive media coverage.