

SunSmart Councils – Media kit

Questions and answers

These questions and answers can accompany media statements released and/or can be worked into media statements.

Why should we worry about high levels of exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR)?

Skin cancer is the most common cancer affecting New Zealanders, with citizens at high risk of developing a skin cancer during their lifetime. Each year in New Zealand there is 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 most recent figures are available, there were 2,017 recorded cases of melanoma.

Melanoma and other skin cancers are serious public health problems for which local government needs to assume some responsibility. The health-care costs of skin cancer to New Zealand are conservatively estimated at \$57 million (O’Dea, 2009). Most skin cancer is preventable – people just need the best possible opportunities to learn about and practice sun protective behaviours.

For information and statistics on skin cancer, visit the SunSmart website (www.sunsmart.org.nz).

What is the benefit to our area of a sun protection policy?

Skin cancer is a very real danger in New Zealand. New Zealand has one of the highest levels of UVR in the world, as well as one of the highest melanoma death rates in the world. Skin cancer is not only a national issue but a local one, as demonstrated by the area’s statistics.

A sun protection policy will help create a healthy environment in the community’s public spaces, including sports and recreation areas. The council is responding to health risks by helping to reduce the worryingly high rates of skin cancer in New Zealand. This policy will give the district’s residents the best opportunities to be SunSmart when they’re outdoors. Long-term and sustainable sun safe practices will improve people’s future health by reducing their risk of developing skin cancer.

Is it the council’s job to offer sun protection to the public?

Councils have always had an important role in promoting public health within their communities. In recent years councils have provided leadership and innovation in a broad range of public health and safety-related activities, including injury prevention,

road safety and health promotion on issues such as drugs, alcohol and smokefree outdoor areas. A sun protection policy has the potential to significantly benefit the community and keep the community as safe as possible from harmful exposure to UVR.

What will the sun protection policy cover? [amend as relevant to your particular policy]

The sun protection policy will cover the following areas:

- outdoor summer events
- outdoor workers
- parks and gardens
- swimming and paddling pools
- other outdoor facilities (eg, camping grounds)
- planning and building approvals.

The policy will ensure shade is provided in public areas, including parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities. Shade considerations will also be incorporated into new outdoor developments and facilities.

Is there a lot of public support for sun protection?

People are recognising the risks of harmful exposure to UVR and the subsequent development of skin cancer. Health organisations, doctors, parents and those who have suffered the effects of skin cancer first hand are just some of the people who have made efforts to raise public awareness of the need to be SunSmart over recent years.

A sun protection policy shows a commitment by local government to play a part in providing a supportive environment for people to make SunSmart decisions.

Do other areas have sun protection policies?

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.

Sample letters to the editor

Dear Editor

Congratulations to the council for its plan to adopt a sun protection policy. Parks are there for families to enjoy, for sporting activity, for recreation. It is entirely reasonable then to ask that people are kept as safe as possible from harmful exposure to UVR at these venues. The last thing we want is for our children to be at risk when they're outdoors enjoying the summer. I'm so glad to see the council is doing their best to keep its residents healthy.

Yours sincerely

Dear Editor

As a parent and [area] resident, I'd like to congratulate the [name of local council] on its plan to introduce a sun protection policy on [date]. People's attitudes towards the sun and tanning have got to change if we're to keep ourselves safe from the sun. I want my kids to grow up knowing the risks of skin cancer and ensuring they protect themselves from it. By supporting our efforts to protect people from the sun, [name of local council] is showing itself to be a progressive local body, prepared to take positive action to help everyone stay safe.

Yours sincerely

Dear Editor

As a [GP/doctor/nurse/health worker] I see all too often the effects of over exposure to the sun. The number of people being diagnosed with melanomas and other skin cancers in the [region] district is of great concern. So I wholeheartedly support [council's] sun protection policy. Anything that reduces the number of people suffering because of skin cancer is vital to the health of our community. We need to make sure that people know how important it is to protect themselves from the sun and give them the opportunity to do so. A sun protection policy is a great first step.

Yours sincerely

Dear Editor

The [organisation] fully supports [council's] sun protection policy. We all know that UV radiation is linked to skin cancer and that almost all these cases are preventable. The vast majority of skin cancers would be prevented if people were SunSmart when they're outdoors. By giving people the chance to stay safe from the sun in [place's] outdoor areas, we might see the incidence of skin cancer in the region drop. Good on you [council] for this positive and forward-thinking move!

Yours sincerely

Sample media release

[Name of Council]
Media Release

For Immediate Use

[Name] Council to join fight against skin cancer

[Name of district] residents will be safer from harmful exposure to the sun with the launch of [name] Council's new sun protection policy today. The council is responding to the alarming numbers of people being diagnosed with skin cancer in the district, currently at the rate of [local stats] every day.

[Name and title of council spokesperson] says the council wants to do everything possible to reduce the chance of people in [name of district] developing skin cancer.

"Skin cancer is a very real danger in New Zealand – but if people protect themselves from the sun, most skin cancers are preventable. We're launching this sun protection policy to help provide the best opportunities for everyone in our community to be SunSmart."

He/she says 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 is 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.

"The council wants to do whatever it can to reduce human suffering and the burden on the health system in the future. We want our communities to enjoy summer activities safely" [name] says.

The [name of council's] sun protection policy covers outdoor summer events, outdoor workers, parks and gardens, swimming and paddling pools and other outdoor facilities, as well as council planning and building approvals.

The policy will ensure shade is provided in public areas and that shade will also be incorporated into the design of new outdoor developments and facilities. [amend according to content of your policy].

[spokesperson] says the council recognises that local government has an important role in minimising the harmful exposure to UV radiation that is experienced by residents, workers and visitors.

“People have become more aware of the dangers of UVR exposure and are realising how important sun protection is. We want people to know that local government is taking the issue very seriously and will continue to keep the community as safe as we can. The policy will ensure that high risk activities and locations will be identified and shade provided where it is really needed.”

[Name] Council is following in the footsteps of other local bodies around New Zealand such as Horowhenua, Wanganui and Wellington City which have also implemented successful sun protection policies and initiatives.

ENDS

Further Information: [spokesperson contact details]