

SunSmart Councils

New Plymouth District Council

Background

New Plymouth District Council has sun protection practices incorporated into its health and safety measures. It does not yet have a generic sun protection policy, covering all areas of council activity. The sun protection practices that have been adopted relate to the council's generic health and safety policy.

The council has the following sun safety practices:

1. Sunscreen recommended and endorsed by a dermatologist is provided to outdoor workers
2. Education and literature from Cancer Society is provided during the annual healthy staff expo
3. Provision of compulsory head protection ie, caps with wide brim or neck flap
4. Annual health checks for outdoor workers with the council's occupational health nurse and, where appropriate, referrals as needed to a dermatologist or medical centre for further examination of moles
5. Compulsory uniform for outdoor workers, made of cooling fabric that provides ventilation and sun protection
6. Rotation of outdoor workers' duties to ensure work within shaded areas
7. Provision of water on site so staff can fill water bottles before commencing work, during breaks and after work
8. Provision of sunscreen in work vehicles.

Implementation

Following submissions over a number of years to New Plymouth District Council by the Cancer Society, sun protection measures have been introduced steadily.

Development of sun protection measures

Internal awareness of sun protection has gradually built up through health and safety events and communication strategies. This has led to wide-spread staff involvement in the process of initiating and implementing sun protection practices.

The council's occupational health nurse and parks operations manager have an 'open door' policy whereby staff can raise issues with them at any time. The council holds a health and safety meeting each month where any concerns can be addressed. Sun protection practices tend to be staff driven, and introduced as issues are raised. Once a request or suggestion is made, it is then taken to council management and goes through a process of assessment and approval before it is adopted.

Initial responses

The implementation of sun protection practices have been well received within the council due to the high awareness among staff of the dangers of UVR. The council is open to the expansion and development of its sun protection measures.

Promotion

The council is proactive in promoting health and safety internally, including sun protection practices. Every year the council holds a week dedicated to health promotion, which includes a staff health expo. During this expo, a dermatologist gives a presentation on UV exposure and melanoma.

Support for the promotion of sun protection has come from the Taranaki Cancer Society which provides pamphlets to be distributed to individual council departments and the council cafeteria.

Evaluation

Staff meetings are held on a regular basis to provide feedback on how sun protection can be provided more effectively.

What worked well

The level of awareness that has been raised within the council is an essential element in the success of the council's sun protection measures. The annual council-organised health expo has been key to educating staff about UVR and skin cancer.

The council has found that, since sun spot checks were introduced, the number of staff being referred for further investigation is decreasing each year, a sign that the measures put in place may already be having a positive effect. Many staff members who are not outdoor workers are also taking responsibility for their own health and requesting sun spot checks when they are available.

What could have worked better

Taranaki Cancer Society health promoters have suggested that they would like to see the council promote sun protection more in the wider community. It has also been suggested that council departments may benefit from working more collaboratively on sun protection to ensure an organisational commitment to the issue.

Future plans

New Plymouth District Council is soon to start running a 'health bus' which will include the service of visiting workers on site for spot checks. This will be implemented annually in order to check for any early signs of skin cancer.

Suggestions

The following suggestions for TLAs intending to extend or develop sun protection practices came from key staff members at New Plymouth District Council and Cancer Society health promoters.

- Increase your knowledge before you start to put ideas into action. Look at what has worked and what hasn't in other places.
- To make a policy or practice work, you need to help people within an organisation understand why the issue is important. Never neglect internal communications.
- Keep your practices as simple and achievable as possible, otherwise you risk your policy just sitting on a shelf gathering dust.
- The best health practices are achieved in local government when there is a collaborative approach within the organisation at all levels.