



Shade audits recommended to reduce melanoma

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The Cancer Society and SunSmart are encouraging schools, councils and sports clubs to undertake shade audits to make sure their shaded areas are really safe.

The number of people dying from melanoma over the past 30 years has increased. Each year over 1650 new cases of potentially fatal melanoma are diagnosed. Annually, more than 300 people die in New Zealand from skin cancer – one of the highest rates in the world.

Cancer Society Health Promotion Manager Dr Jan Pearson says New Zealanders are uniquely vulnerable to melanoma and other skin cancers because of the environment in which we live, and effective use of shade is one of the best defences available.

“Kiwis know they need to Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap, but haven’t yet fully understood the importance of shade. We recommend anyone with outdoor facilities – including schools, councils and sports clubs – undertake a shade audit to ensure they’re providing adequate and effective shade structures that protect people from UV rays.

“For example, a shade audit may find that children are not sitting beneath a shade structure because it is too cold in the shade. In this case, introducing a different shade material that allows warmth through may be the answer.”

SunSmart Spokesperson Wendy Billingsley says, “Just one severe sunburn incident doubles a child’s risk of melanoma later in life. That shows how important it is to provide effective shade cover.

“Shade audits take account of sun direction and movement and identify areas most in need of protection. They also highlight issues with existing shade structures such as trees and buildings which have often been positioned to provide shade on the basis of guesswork. Many actually provide little or no cover at the times of the day or year when it is needed most.”

Shade audits save money by enabling proper planning for shade, therefore reducing risk from UV rays. To help schools, councils and sports clubs carry out shade audits, some organisations are using a software package called WebShade, which helps assess how effective shade can be planned and provided.

Data about the orientation of buildings, trees and outdoor areas are entered into the program which then assesses different ways to reduce the risk of UV exposure. Options can include rescheduling or relocating activities so that shade is used more effectively, or modelling the use of different natural or built shade structures, before money is spent on building shade structures or planting trees.

“WebShade is particularly useful for schools, not only for planning, but also as a learning tool,” says Cornerstone Christian School principal Nigel Tongs.

WebShade was used by Year 8 students at his school in Palmerston North, and helped teach pupils a variety of skills including measurement, calculations, computer skills and team work.

“Our school was built with deliberately north facing buildings to maximise sunlight, and verandas were built to provide shade. However, WebShade showed the way we’d built them was largely ineffective because too much sunlight comes in underneath.”

The school is now building new decking and activity areas, and is re-scheduling some activities so that they occur at times and places with the best shade protection. The programme also showed the best place for planting trees as part of future planning.

Franklin District Council re-designs a number of recreation areas, or builds new ones each year, and now plans to include software-based shade audits in all its outdoor planning.

Parks and Recreation Manager Richard Dellenberg says, “Doing a shade audit helps you work with the environment and existing shade elements, such as trees, when positioning play areas and walkways. As a council, it’s important for us to get this right, now more than ever. If we want our kids to be outdoors and active, we’ve got to be planning for shade cover effectively.

“In the Auckland region the weather can be really warm, and we know there are certain playgrounds and outdoor areas parents won’t take their kids to in the heat of the day because there is no shade.”

For more information:

Further information about staying safe in the sun can be found at www.sunsmart.co.nz. More information about WebShade can be found at www.webshade.co.nz.

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Background

Depleted ozone, clear skies and a closeness to the sun are all reasons why UV rays are particularly harmful in New Zealand. The outdoor lifestyle of many kiwis and the fair skin of some population groups also makes us vulnerable.

Kiwis are encouraged to 'Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap' when outside, and especially to slip into some shade between the hours of 11am and 4pm.

One severe sunburn incident doubles a child's risk of melanoma later in life, and for this reason parents and schools should think about personal protection strategies which include children using shade protection when they go outside.

Research has indicated that people are more active in the shade, and this is an important issue in the light of our current nationwide obesity epidemic. Providing well-shaded areas where people can be physically active without over-heating or exposing themselves to sun cancer risk is crucial to school and council planning, and to the wellbeing of future generations.

Because of the movement of the sun, an area that is shaded at one time of the day or year, may be more exposed at the time when shade is needed most. WebShade ensures that the position of the sun and the projection of shade are accurately