

SunSmart Councils

Wanganui District Council

Background

The Wanganui District Council adopted a sun protection policy in 2005, and has taken action to implement sun protection and raise awareness in the district. All projects that are included in the council's long-term council community plan (LTCCP) are expected to align to the sun protection policy.

The policy was created after a successful submission to the council by the Wanganui Cancer Society health promoter. This led to a partnership between the health promoter and the council. A council policy analyst and the Cancer Society health promoter worked together to develop a sun protection policy.

Wanganui District Council offers protection from harmful exposure to UVR in the following ways:

1. Outdoor events – there is substantial shading from trees in public areas where outdoor events take place. Community groups are also made aware of SunSmart practices when they apply to hold an outdoor event on council-owned property
2. Outdoor workers – workers are provided with appropriate sunhats, sunscreen and sunglasses. Those employed in the council's parks department are also required to wear long-sleeved shirts and gloves
3. Parks and gardens – trees are being planted in parks to eventually provide more shade. Free sunscreen is offered at some children's playgrounds during daylight saving months
4. Swimming and paddling pools – umbrellas are provided at Wanganui East Pool, and a shade sail has also been built on the outdoor section of a new swimming pool in the area.

Implementation

The Wanganui Centre of the Cancer Society began making submissions to the Wanganui District Council on the introduction of sun protection measures in 2001. Then in 2004, a Cancer Society health promoter went through the council's community outcomes step by step and highlight where and how the council could offer sun protection. In her submission, she highlighted these opportunities in both the council's draft annual plan and the draft service management plan.

Links to community outcomes included:

- *a safe environment*
- *development and positive management of recreational and sport facilities*
- *community participation in the decision-making process*
- *to improve, promote and protect public health and safety*

- *joint projects with other groups or agencies where there are mutual goals or a significant benefit to the community.*

At this time, the health promoter also approached a policy analyst at Wanganui District Council who became a sun protection 'champion' within the council and began work on an official policy. The development of the policy was a partnership, with the community and the council working together to achieve better outcomes for the community.

Initial responses

Members of council were shocked at the statistics they were given – at the time, Wanganui had two skin cancer diagnoses¹ a day with one a month being melanoma - and were receptive to the idea of a sun protection policy.

Some concerns were raised about costs and workloads. It was decided that the policy should not be statutory (ie, legally binding) as it would then need to be monitored, with considerable cost involved. Instead, it was agreed that the policy should be designed to provide education, information, advice and encouragement both within the council and the community.

Development of policy

The Wanganui District Council's policy analyst worked with the Wanganui Cancer Society's health promoter to develop the sun protection policy. Although no formal project plan was developed; an informal document served as a guide throughout the process.

To aid in the development of the policy, the council contacted other TLAs around New Zealand via email, to discuss their sun protection policies and practices.

Internal communication of the policy and its importance was essential, to ensure it was implemented properly. With this in mind, it was decided to build up awareness of sun protection through staff newsletters, while the policy was being developed.

Policy adoption by council

The process of adopting the policy began with informal discussions between councillors and those working on the policy, prior to a formal meeting. At the formal meeting a report was presented to the council's community development committee by the policy analyst and health promoter. Following this report, the council adopted the policy.

¹ Personal communication, Sue Stewart, Wanganui Cancer Society.

Policy objectives

The approved policy was designed to cover four key roles the council had in providing sun protection:

1. *As managers of parks, gardens and recreational facilities:* goals include - giving guidelines on sun protection to organisations which book out recreation facilities; providing information to organisations about the use of Wanganui Cancer Society's umbrellas and sunscreen; encouraging SunSmart events; looking for opportunities to plant trees or build shade structures where required etc
2. *As employers of outdoor workers and contractors:* goals include providing sun protection information to employees; providing a training module for outdoor workers about skin cancer; providing outdoor employees with access to protective clothing such as hats and sunscreen etc
3. *As community educators:* goals include - reminding the public about the need to cover up and minimise exposure to the sun; provide brochures on the importance of sun protection at customer service and visitor information centres; including appropriate images of SunSmart behaviour in council publications etc
4. *As a consent authority:* goals include - encouraging owners of outdoor eating venues to provide shade (such as umbrellas, canopies and awnings) for patrons; providing information on sun protection to people prior to making application for consent to council; maintaining a street tree policy to ensure appropriate selection, planting and maintenance of street trees etc.

Promotion

Wanganui District Council held an official launch for the sun protection policy. Once the launch had taken place, the policy was promoted in internal newsletters and on the council website.

The policy was also promoted in the community through the council offices. This led to requests from outdoor workers for shade provision on some sites, and requests from parking attendants for sunhats.

Media coverage

When the sun protection policy was launched, local newspaper the *Wanganui Chronicle* was contacted to cover the story. The newspaper gave significant coverage and ran a photograph to go with the article. The story relied heavily on skin cancer statistics that were provided to journalists by the Wanganui Cancer Society.

Evaluation

An internal evaluation was undertaken by the Wanganui District Council's policy analyst about a year after the sun protection policy was launched. This

evaluation was conducted through one-on-one interviews with council staff and external stakeholders. The report concluded the sun protection policy had raised awareness of the need for sun protection considerably within the council itself and the wider community.

What worked well

Raising awareness of the issue within the council was key to the eventual adoption of the policy. The health promoter's presentation of how council goals and objectives could be married with sun protection measures helped the council understand how a sun protection policy could work. By highlighting particular community outcomes in the council's draft annual plan and the draft service management plan, the benefits of incorporating sun protection measures were spelled out clearly and persuasively.

Promotion of the policy through council offices was a positive aspect to the process, which resulted in high compliance of sun protection measures and council workers proactively requesting sun protection. This demonstrated a change in attitude as a result of the council's efforts to educate council employees about the need for sun protection. The council evaluation found that the introduction of the policy had led to a generally higher level of awareness amongst staff about the link between excessive exposure to UVR and the development of skin cancer.

Providing media with local and national skin cancer statistics and publicising the policy resulted in good coverage, helping to increase public awareness of the issue.

What could have worked better

The council's policy analyst would have preferred to undertake additional monitoring of the policy. This has proved difficult due to limited staff resources, workload and little time available to do follow-up work.

Health promoters have noted that clearer accountability could improve the implementation of sun protection measures. With outside contractors and event organisers, compliance with sun protection requirements is not as robust as it could be. This is a difficult area for the council to control as the policy is not statutory.

Future goals

Wanganui District Council is looking into ways to implement sun protection as part of development and planning processes. For example, the incorporation of shade design.

The council has continued to raise awareness of the issue internally by inviting the Cancer Society health promoter to give an induction course to current council staff on the danger of UVR.

Suggestions

The following suggestions for TLAs intending to extend or develop a sun protection policy came from staff members at Wanganui District Council and regional health promoters.

- Sun protection is still new to people's thinking – in order to get it on people's agenda, keep persevering.
- For a health promoter, getting the submission process right is vital. Individual council objectives should be matched up with sun protection measures. This ensures the council has a clear understanding of how a policy is going to work without increasing workload and costs too dramatically.
- Look at integrating sun protection into the council's long-term health strategy rather than as a stand-alone mechanism.
- Have an implementation plan so everyone knows what they're doing
- Identify and mitigate risk so there is more chance of the policy being adopted and successfully implemented.