

SunSmart Councils

Wellington City Council success story

Background

Wellington City Council has sun protection practices incorporated into health and safety measures. It does not yet have a generic sun protection policy, covering all areas of council activity. The council's decision to systematically develop sun protection practices for outdoor workers began in 2003. The sun protection practices that have been employed pertain to the council's health and safety policy.

The council has practices pertaining to sun safety in the following ways:

1. Outdoor events – provision of shade (in the form of umbrellas) and sunscreen
2. Parks and gardens – trees have been planted to offer shade
3. Swimming and paddling pools – all outdoor pools have tables with umbrellas available
4. Outdoor workers – workers are now provided with their own tube of sunscreen, wide-brimmed hats, wraparound sunglasses, collared shirts (with a long sleeves option), as well as water containers to prevent dehydration.

Implementation

Wellington City Council's SunSmart project for outdoor workers was initiated through discussions in 2003 between its health and safety manager, occupational health nurse, and corporate health and safety team. Some sun protection practices for outdoor workers were already in place at the time, but individuals within the council wanted to make these practices more effective and take extra measures to protect outdoor workers.

Development of project plan

Council staff researched and developed their project plan through various means. Staff members consulted with the Cancer Society, attended health and safety meetings, and explored the measures that had been taken by other TLAs around the country. Having previously worked as a health promoter, the council's occupational health nurse contributed extensive prior knowledge of sun protection.

A vital component of the project plan was to raise awareness of the issue within the council itself – through the use of internal publications. In addition, Cancer Society health promoters were invited as guest speakers to health and safety meetings for the council's outside workers. Skin cancer statistics were presented to the corporate health and safety committee.

An idea was put forward to aid the council in providing not only protection but also monitoring of health and safety issues. As well as minimising risk by providing protective shade, work gear and sunscreen, it was proposed that spot-checking for outdoor workers should take place on a yearly basis. This involved all outdoor workers being invited to attend a 'lumps, bumps and moles check' which was carried out by the nurse and a doctor after summer.

Initial responses

Council management and the corporate health and safety team provided substantial support to implement the new suggested practices. Spot checking was the most difficult element of the project to get approved, due to expense.

However the project met most resistance from outdoor workers themselves. Some workers showed reluctance to wear the provided clothing as they felt too hot, and some fashion issues were raised with regard to the hats and sunglasses.

Wellington City Council health and safety policy

Although practices to protect outdoor workers from the sun are implemented every year, Wellington City Council has not adopted or developed a specific sun protection policy. The practices outlined in this case study fall under the council's health and safety policy. Sun protection costs are incorporated into the council's health and safety budget, with no separated budget having been allocated.

Policy wording

Wellington City Council's sun protection practices are contained within the council's commitment to the provision of a healthy and safe working environment for employees. They relate specifically to the council's resolve to:

- *ensure that an effective health and safety system is maintained and regularly reviewed for continuous improvement*
- *integrate health and safety into day-to-day management practices*
- *involve employees in health and safety matters and encourage their active participation in hazard identification and control*
- *establish communication channels to ensure health and safety issues are discussed and that information and decisions are fed back to all interested parties.*

Promotion

The written promotion of sun protection for outdoor workers took numerous forms and continues to do so. Internal newsletters carry the message; SunSmart posters are displayed at pools, in staff tearooms, meeting rooms, lifts and foyers; spot checking pamphlets are handed out to workers and also made available at public pool information stands.

Evaluation

Over the course of five years, Wellington City Council's outdoor worker project continues to be successful and is implemented during summertime every year. It has been noted that there has been an increase in compliance during this time from outdoor workers – they are now far more willing to use the sun protection gear and sunscreen provided by the council.

Informal monitoring and evaluation of the project takes place after summer, through a report to the health and safety manager. This includes how many workers have attended the spot checking sessions as well as how many have been referred for medical attention.

What worked well

The large number of promotional materials helped to raise awareness of sun protection both internally within council buildings and for outdoor workers. Written information had the benefit of allowing the key messages to be expressed clearly and reinforced continually through different visual resources such as posters and pamphlets. The council still works in conjunction with the Wellington Division of the Cancer Society to keep up-to-date with current sun protection issues and key messages.

One of the major factors in getting buy-in from outdoor workers and compliance with council policy was through the council's occupational health nurse being on the ground 'walking the talk'. This reinforced the messages on a more personal level and allowed workers to enter into discussions about the issues, if they wished to. The occupational health nurse continues to spend a lot of time each summer 'on site' with outdoor council workers at parks, pools, zoos etc, promoting sun safety.

What could have worked better

A specific sun protection practice that the council originally implemented was to put two litre tubs of sunscreen on site for council workers to use. The tubs had a tendency to 'go missing' and this practice was eventually abandoned. Workers are now supplied with tubes of sunscreen for personal use.

Suggestions

The following suggestions for TLAs intending to extend or develop sun protection policies for outdoor workers came from health and safety team members at Wellington City Council.

- Be very specific about what is needed before implementation and make targets achievable. Practices can be built on and improved every year.
- Work on the ground is vital. Contact with outdoor workers and offering time to discuss sun protection practices helps enormously with mutual understanding and compliance.

- Target the audience carefully – get the SunSmart message out in internal publications including business groups that work with the council, for example, newsletters for people working in the building industry.
- Make sure your messages are always culturally appropriate. Maori and Pacific staff are sometimes under the impression that their colouring will protect them from harmful exposure to UVR. It is important to highlight that this is not the case.
- Listen to what outdoor workers have to say and consider each year how to do things better.