

SunSmart Council

City of Whittlesea, Australia, success story

Background

Skin cancer (both non-melanoma and melanoma) is the most common form of cancer in Australia, which has highest rate of skin cancer in the world. The City of Whittlesea was the first council in the Victoria region to design and implement a shade policy to reduce the incidence of skin cancer.

Whittlesea City Council's Municipal Public Health Plan (1996-1999) identified skin cancer as a major health issue and proposed the development of a municipal shade policy. The resulting policy was adopted in 1999 and covers a number of areas.

- *Council-owned and operated facilities*, including sports and recreation facilities, playgrounds and parks – the council identifies areas to improve and develop shade, shade provision is included in all planning or upgrading of facilities.
- *Council-owned facilities operated by committees of management*, including childcare centres and pre-schools – the council undertakes to provide constructed or natural shade to all pre-schools and childcare centres on a priority basis.
- *Privately owned facilities in the city of Whittlesea* - all planning applications that pertain to the use of commercial and industrial outdoor areas where people congregate will need to demonstrate that shade has been considered and addressed.
- *Council staff* - a SunSmart Policy for council staff had previously been developed and implemented as part of council's Occupational Health and Safety Strategies. The policy covers sunscreen, protective clothing, education and shade.
- *Information for the general public* - where possible the council provides information to new landowners in the City of Whittlesea to help them design their gardens to enhance shade provision.
- *Council-run events* - portable shade is provided where necessary and practicable for events held on council owned or managed land.
- *Amendments to planning guidelines* - the policy outlines a number of specific amendments to incorporate shade provision.

Implementation

To implement its shade policy, Whittlesea Council formed a staff working group made up of members from each council department that had a major stake in the project.

Policy development

The policy was developed with a whole-of-council approach to shade creation and was designed after extensive interdepartmental consultation through the working group.

It was written to incorporate a strong emphasis on appropriate shade planning both within council and as part of the planning application process. It addresses issues of both natural shade and constructed shade and was implemented with the support and assistance of the Cancer Council of Victoria.

John Greenwood, one of Australia's leading authorities on shade design, provided a staff training seminar on sun protection. The training focused on the principles of shade involved in the planning and design of sun protection at public venues. Representatives from councils in other areas of Australia also attended this seminar.

Policy wording

The Whittlesea City shade policy outlines the following objectives:

- 1. to ensure that the provision of shade is an integral part of council's planning processes*
- 2. to seek to increase the provision of shade at council-owned pre-schools and child care centres*
- 3. to seek to increase the provision of shade in parks and playgrounds*
- 4. to seek to increase the provision of shade at sporting and recreation facilities*
- 5. to seek to increase the provision of shade by private developers*
- 6. to seek to increase the provision of shade by private home owners by education and promotion of shade concepts.*

Promotion

Whittlesea Council held an official launch of its shade policy that was attended by Australia's shadow Minister for Health. This resulted in significant local media coverage, both in newspapers and on the radio. All elected council representatives attended the launch.

Whittlesea's shade policy gained additional publicity when it received a Victorian public health award for excellence in 1999. The council continues to try to maintain a high public awareness of the issue by informing local media each time a new shade structure is erected.

Evaluation

Whittlesea Council is currently undertaking an evaluation of its shade policy. It is attempting to address issues such as the provision of more specific guidelines for different shade needs in different settings.

What worked well

The initial shade training seminar was crucial in educating staff on including shade design in planning processes. Raising awareness internally has resulted in shade being incorporated into a number of different council policies with reasonable regularity.

The council has noted a behavioural change in the public in terms of sun protection. It has found that in recent years, wherever shade is offered, the public will seek it out and make use of it.

What could have worked better

Although initial training of council staff was extremely successful, the council acknowledges that refresher training is also needed. It has found that shade design skills have dropped as people have left the council over the years and the shade policy has lost some momentum. It has been suggested that this could have been avoided if the original working group had been ongoing.

The council is also considering how to solve the ongoing and significant problem of vandalism of shade structures which is resulting in high damage costs.

Suggestions

The following suggestions for TLAs intending to extend or develop a shade protection policy came from key staff members at Whittlesea Council.

- Organise an inter-departmental internal working group of members who have a stake in the policy. Collaboration yields the best results.
- Make sure everyone working on the policy knows why they're doing it and is aware of the local issues surrounding shade protection.
- Incorporate staff training into the policy actions.