

The 2007 Local Government Sun Protection Survey A Summary



Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world, with at least one in every two Australians being diagnosed with skin cancer in their lifetime.

The local government sector is well placed to support efforts to reduce exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation in the community as they have an integral role in the town planning process, are responsible for granting planning and development approvals, and also control and operate a range of recreational and community facilities. Additionally, a significant proportion of the local government workforce work outdoors for part or all of the day.

In 2007 The Cancer Council Western Australia, with funding support from the Department of Health, conducted a survey to investigate sun protection practices within local governments in Western Australia.

The aims of the research were to:

- Determine the extent of sun protection policy and practice within the local government sector
- Identify gaps or areas for improvement within each local council
- Provide a foundation for future collaboration with local governments
- Inform future SunSmart local government initiatives

This summary report outlines the key findings from the survey. The full report can be downloaded from the SunSmart local government section of The Cancer Council WA website: www.cancerwa.asn.au.

Methodology

The survey consisted of a self-report questionnaire that was divided into five sections: general information; outdoor workers; outdoor swimming pools; outdoor areas and facilities; and planning and development.

In May 2007 the survey was sent to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of each local government in Western Australia. Of the 142 local governments in Western Australia, 72 participated in the survey, a response rate of 50.7%.

Key findings

General Information

- 42% of respondents had a general sun protection policy that referred to activities throughout their council
- 61% included sun protection in their occupational safety and health plan
- Over 50% provided or displayed information about sun protection at council premises
- Of the 18 councils that operated an early childhood service, 70% had a policy that addressed sun protection or shade
- When asked what would help councils to address sun protection issues in the community, the top responses were policy templates or examples, access to funding, and information about sun protection.



Outdoor workers

- 59% of respondents had a sun protection policy for outdoor workers
- Almost all councils provided sunscreen, sunglasses, sun protective clothing and sun protective hats to staff members who work outdoors
- 90% required worksite supervisors to demonstrate good sun protection behaviour at work
- 38% provided portable shade for outdoor workers
- 62% scheduled outdoor work programs to avoid peak UV radiation times (10am to 3pm)
- 87% provided training and information to outdoor workers to increase knowledge about sun protection and skin cancer.

Outdoor swimming pools

Forty councils (56%) managed at least one outdoor swimming pool. Of these:

- 17% had a sun protection or shade policy for the outdoor pool area
- 97% provided sunglasses and adequate shade to pool staff
- Over 75% provided broad brimmed hats, long sleeved shirts and trousers or long shorts to staff
- 81% provided training and information to pool staff to increase knowledge about sun protection and skin cancer
- 48% provided a point of sale for sun protection items (note: all of these offered sunscreen)
- 68% provided free sunscreen to pool users
- 32% had permanent signs in place encouraging sun protection
- 39% provided patrons with information about sun protection or skin cancer.

Additionally:

- 67% of toddler pools were fully shaded (28% of toddler pools were partly shaded)
- 78% of full-sized pools and 90% of dive pools had no shade at all
- The majority of recreational leisure areas, and marshalling and spectator areas were adequately shaded; water-based activity areas were less likely to be adequately shaded.

Outdoor areas and facilities

- 16% had a sun protection or shade policy for outdoor areas or facilities
- Permanent signage encouraging sun protection was not widely used
- 55% routinely considered sun protection or shade when planning public works
- 16% provided a point of sale for sun protection items at an outdoor facility; almost all of these sold sunscreen.

Planning and development

- 85% did not have any planning and development policies, requirements or strategies relating to shade or sun protection
- 47% considered shade or sun protection in public open space
- 28% considered shade or sun protection in residential development
- 21% considered shade or sun protection in commercial or industrial development
- 15% intend to develop a policy or plan about shade or sun protection.

Conclusion

The results of this survey suggest that sun protection is addressed across many areas of council activity, such as the protection of outdoor workers as well as staff and patrons of outdoor swimming pools. It is clear however that gaps exist, particularly in the areas of policy, planning and development, and that a more comprehensive approach is necessary to reduce exposure to UV radiation in the community.



Where to from here

Each council that participated in the survey received a personalised feedback report outlining areas of strength and opportunities for improvement as well as a copy of *The Shade Handbook: A practical guide for shade development in Western Australia* produced by The Cancer Council WA.

Additionally, the following recommendations were made in light of the findings:

- Conduct an impact assessment within six months to evaluate how local councils utilised their feedback report
- Conduct a follow-up survey in two years to document any changes in sun protection policies and practices of the local government sector
- Develop a suite of policy templates to assist local governments to implement policies throughout council
- Promote examples of best practice by developing and promoting case studies
- Continue to promote existing strategies and resources to local councils, such as The Shade Handbook, the outdoor worker resources, workplace presentations, and the outdoor events kit
- Advocate for the inclusion of sun protection considerations in building codes and planning requirements particularly as they relate to community facilities and public spaces
- Encourage services that provide workplace skin checks to meet principles of best practice.

Acknowledgements

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This research was conducted with funding from the Department of Health.

The Cancer Council Western Australia can provide a range of services to local governments in regards to sun protection and shade issues, including resources and educational presentations, as well as advice and assistance on policy development.

For more information please contact the SunSmart Local Government and Workplace Project Coordinator on (08) 9212 4333 or education@cancerwa.asn.au.