

THIS PARK  
CONTAINS FRESH  
TARANAKI AIR  
PLEASE DO NOT SMOKE  
IN OUR PARKS



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# Smoke Free Parks & Playgrounds



South Taranaki District Council





# SMOKE FREE PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS

## SUMMARY AND IMPACT

South Taranaki District Council was the first local government authority in New Zealand to take a real leadership role with the *smoke free healthy living* message when it implemented its Smoke Free Environments Policy. The aim of the policy is to promote a smoke free lifestyle as being both desirable and the norm by encouraging people not to smoke in Council parks, playgrounds and reserves, as well as in its swimming pool surrounds. As part of the policy, smoking is banned in all indoor Council facilities.

In 2005, through a strategic partnership with two respected national health organisations, the South Taranaki District Council demonstrated courageous leadership in its community and amongst its peers. While initially standing alone and receiving some criticism for “taking political correctness to a new level” and “impinging on the few remaining rights of smokers”, over the past 12 months several other local governments have followed South Taranaki District Council’s example by either adopting a similar smoke free policy or by holding smoke free awareness days in their parks and playgrounds.

The key to the policy’s success has been through strategic partnerships with national organisations and a position of appealing to those who smoke to be positive role models for children. The policy has not been one of punitive enforcement. A respectful but firm approach together with the undisputable evidence of the negative health and environmental impact of smoking has all contributed to the success and replication of a similar type policy by other local governments.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The South Taranaki District has a population of 25,700 (Provisional census data 2006). While its population has demonstrated a slight decrease since the last census, the number of children under the age of 15 years represents over 25% of the population which is higher than the New Zealand average. 39% of Maori are under the age of 15 years.

Within the South Taranaki District, there are 84 parks and reserves and 24 playgrounds. South Taranaki’s parks are listed under the Parks for Pleasure banner.

## VISION AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

South Taranaki’s mission statement includes a commitment to “inspire a vibrant and caring spirit of community” where “the natural environment is cherished and cared for” where “every resident has the opportunity to enhance their mental, spiritual and physical health”. The Smoke Free Environments Policy reflects the Council’s strategic direction of creating a smoke free lifestyle in South Taranaki which is both desirable and the norm through the protection of our children’s health and the environment.

South Taranaki’s Smoke Free Environments Policy (attached) has six key components. Collectively, this policy contributes to the broad regional outcomes that provide for a *Secure and Healthy Taranaki* and a *Sustainable Taranaki*.

Specifically the policy contributes to the district’s community outcomes that:

*“Our natural environment is continually enhanced through programmes which reflect our community’s sense of kaitiakitanga (caring and protection)”.*



*“All residents are able to access the health services, education and information they want.”*

And that: *“Our residents feel safe in their homes and in their communities.”*

## **NEED AND BENEFITS OF THE POLICY**

The prevalence of smoking in Taranaki at 24.1% of the total population, is slightly higher than the national average of 23.4%. The rates of smoking for Maori are significantly higher than that for non-Maori with 44.5% of the adult Maori population smoking (New Zealand Health Survey for Taranaki 2002/03)

Research shows that children exposed to second hand smoke are exposed to significant health risks and that children and young adults whose role models are smokers are more likely to emulate their behaviour.

While more than 75% of people living in New Zealand have chosen not to smoke, around 400 New Zealanders die each year because of exposure to second-hand smoke. This represents about 8% over and above deaths due to direct smoking and about three quarters of the number of people killed each year on the roads in New Zealand.

The key objective of the Smoke Free Environments Policy is to provide a message to the community that a smoke free lifestyle is desirable in South Taranaki and that children need positive adult role models. In addition the policy promotes the concept of Parks for Pleasure and the role all citizens have in maintaining a clean environment.

## **THE CATALYST**

In December 2003, the Smoke Free Environments Act 1990 was amended to include buildings and grounds of schools and early childhood centres being smoke free, along with further restrictions on workplace smoking and restrictions on the sale and promotion of smoking through retail outlets.

Like all other local governments across New Zealand, South Taranaki District Council could have chosen to merely meet its obligations under the Smoke Free Environments Act by meeting the minimum legislative requirements. However, the Council decided that it wanted to demonstrate proactive leadership in its community through its Smoke Free Environments Policy.

Legislation had already set a smoke free benchmark for school grounds. Introducing “smoke free” parks and playgrounds provided a consistent position of positive role modelling for children and protection for children against the detrimental effects of second hand smoking. It also supported the Council’s established commitment to Parks for Pleasure and looking after the environment.

## **EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES**

There were a number of key techniques to the effective management of this project. They include:-

- Using legislation as a catalyst for the Council to consider whether its role would be reactive and compliant or that it would adopt a position of leadership and proactivity
- Demonstrating the synergies between the proposed policy and that already implemented in school outdoor areas and playgrounds
- Providing evidence of the detrimental impact of second hand smoking and the impact of role modelling on children’s behaviour later in life
- Gaining the support of two respected health organisations – the Cancer Society and the Health Sponsorship Council, that assisted in promoting the policy and challenged other local governments within New Zealand



- Providing a policy which was value based and appealed to the goodwill of the community through cleverly worded signage “This Park contains fresh Taranaki Air. Please do not smoke in our parks” rather than being punitively enforced
- Gaining consensus at a senior management level for the policy before it was introduced to the elected members
- Gaining support from the Community Services & Development portfolio group, comprising 5 councillors before taking the policy to the full Council
- Adopting a planned communication strategy
- Launching the policy with the erection of a number of signs in parks and playgrounds across the district and staging a planned roll out of signage over a two year period
- Public availability of the policy through the Council’s website
- Accessibility by other local governments to the process and methodology used, including the report written for Council’s deliberation
- Transferability of the policy to other local governments in New Zealand and overseas
- Incorporating the key message of not smoking in South Taranaki District parks and playgrounds through event promotion and Greenspace contract specifications
- Providing an ongoing and consistent educational message through high visibility signage in the parks and playgrounds

## **PARTICIPATION AND BUY IN FROM STAKEHOLDERS**

In developing the policy, assistance was sought from both the Cancer Society and Health Sponsorship Fund who provided information on national and international research and trends. Both organisations were enthusiastic partners as the policy was consistent with their respective organisation’s goals and objectives and provided assistance with funding for the signage. There is no doubt that they each saw the successful implementation of South Taranaki District’s Smoke Free Environments Policy as the benchmark they would use to lobby other local governments in New Zealand to take a similar stance.

Logos of both partnering organisations on signage, and promotional material added credibility. Taking a team approach and sharing the kudos and successes has provided a collective opportunity to achieve organisational goals. It has also provided a collective strength in the wake of criticism from other local governments and members of the public who were opposed to further restrictions for smokers. Promotion of the policy has been significantly increased and diversified through the communication channels of both partners which go well beyond the boundaries of New Zealand. This has consequently resulted in South Taranaki’s profile being raised nationally and internationally.

Buy-in and participation from Tangata Whenua has been enthusiastic as the policy is about the protection of children and the environment and aligns well to Maori health promotion. An example of this was demonstrated at the Pae Pae in the Park (an event in one of the Council’s domains in Patea) which attracted well over a thousand residents and visitors, the majority being Maori. A request was made by the master of ceremonies to the crowd to refrain from smoking in the domain and that was positively adhered to.

Councillor buy-in was gained through an approach which emphasised leadership and appealed to those who smoked to demonstrate positive role modelling rather than taking a heavy handed, punitive approach

## **INNOVATION & ORIGINALITY**

The unique factor about the Smoke Free Environments Policy is that it is a policy that goes beyond the legislative requirements. It called on the courage of the Council to stand up and be counted as leaders and to go where no



local government had gone before. It depended on the Council having a strong understanding of the outcomes that the South Taranaki community would support and it meant holding firm to a policy position despite initial criticism from other local governments.

The signage was innovative in the statement it made: **“This park contains fresh Taranaki Air. Please do not smoke in our parks”** A number of local governments have copied the wording and localised it.

The support of the two sponsoring health organisations and the inclusion of their logo on all signage and promotional material gave the policy additional credibility.

## SUCCESSFUL RESULTS – FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL

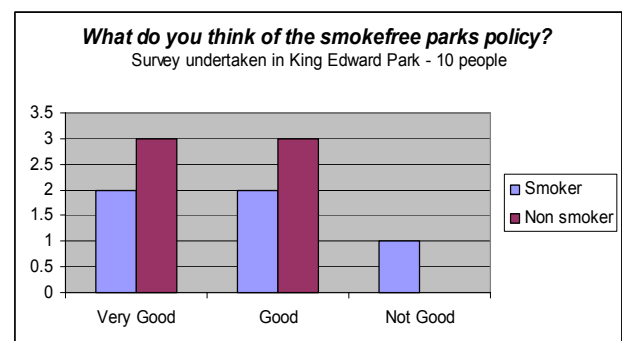
The policy created considerable local and national media interest, raising the profile on health issues associated with both smoking and second hand smoking. Talk back radio shows, local television and local and national papers all assisted in raising community awareness about the dangers of smoking.

While at this early stage we are not able to measure the success of the policy in terms of reduced smoking in the district or reduced up-take of juvenile smokers, regional indicators have been determined and do include statistics on smoking which provides a bench mark that we will be able to measure against into the future.

In August 2005 when the South Taranaki District Council’s Smoke Free Environments Policy was launched there were no local governments in New Zealand that requested people not to smoke in their parks and playgrounds. In July 2006 there were several local governments that had adopted a similar policy. These include Gisborne District Council, Upper Hutt City Council, Timaru Council, South Wairarapa District Council and Invercargill City Council

The cost to the Council of implementation of the policy has been minimal. The two sponsoring health organisations contributed towards the signage. The branding was developed in-house and the Council’s costs were met within its operational budget. Vandalism of the signage has been surprisingly low with minimal replacement of signs required.

A small sample survey was undertaken in Hawera’s King Edward Park in May 2006. The sample included teenagers and adults of all ages. 50% of the participants were smokers and only one person felt the policy was “a bit silly”. She agreed that people should not smoke in a school playground but felt it was okay in parks as long as butts were disposed of properly.



## WAS THE POLICY THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

The answer depends on the value placed on the health and wellbeing of the community and the lifestyle we aspire to provide for our children. South Taranaki District Council is proud of taking a lead role with this initiative and the interest and uptake by other local governments in New Zealand supports its position.

## ADAPTABILITY BY OTHER CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCILS

Accessibility and the capacity by other local governments to adapt the policy and methodology for its implementation to suit their own needs has been a key success factor. The fact that the health research has been undertaken and the analysis completed, with permission to copy whatever might be useful has made the reporting process for officers relatively easy. Sharing the methodology has provided insights for officers and streamlined their processes.

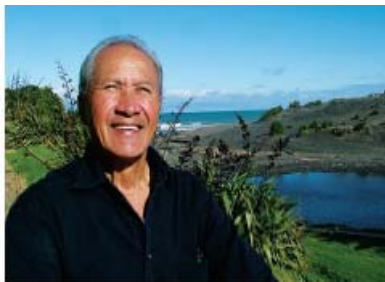


## SUMMARY

The Smoke Free Environments Policy provided an opportunity for South Taranaki District, a small rural local government to demonstrate leadership and commitment to the health and well being of its community. It aimed to protect both the children of South Taranaki through positive role modelling and the unique natural environment.

Partnering with two credible health organisations added considerable value to the policy. While South Taranaki’s policy position was not without its critics, the community has responded very positively and the rest of New Zealand is wanting to be part of it.

*“We want healthy role models for our kids. Kids need to see teenagers, especially in parks, not smoking”.*



*“The policy is one of the best ideas the Council has ever had. The most important thing to any human being is their health, not money”*

*“I think it is a great idea to have no smoking in parks, especially where there are children. Children need to be encouraged not to smoke cigarettes”*

### APPENDICES ATTACHED:

- Appendix 1 - Policy Document
- Appendix 2 – Media Release
- Appendix 3 – Cancer Society Newsletter
- Appendix 4 – Letter from Ministry of Health