

FACT SHEET 5

Addressing the Challenges



When considering introducing Smoke-free Outdoor Areas policy, councils often have similar questions and concerns. These relate to:

- a lack of resources to enforce the policy
- disinterest from staff or other councillors
- difficulties in measuring public support
- costs associated with signage; and
- possible opposition from local businesses
- geographical location

The following testimonials are drawn from interviews conducted as part of the 2008 Smoke-free Outdoor Areas survey and provide practical and first hand insights into the questions that councils considering introducing policy might have.

Enforcement

The most commonly asked question in relation to the introduction of smoke-free outdoor areas relates to enforcement, with many councils expressing reluctance to introduce a policy that requires labour intensive policing. Councils which have introduced policy have found that it is actually self enforcing and enjoys good compliance from the public.

"Realising that the community self regulates was important. The policy raises the community expectation to decrease smoking." Wollongong City Council

"The smoke-free areas policy is mostly self-enforcing. Recently I saw someone being asked to stop smoking at a playground and complying happily once the sign was pointed out." Pittwater Council

"Police don't have the resources to make sure we stop at every stop sign and stick to every speed limit but that doesn't mean the laws shouldn't be there." Councillor Barbara Gaudry, Newcastle City Council. Newcastle Herald 12 December 2007

"Three councils – Mosman, Manly and Warringah have outdoor smoking bans. These bans have operated since 2004 on little more than peer pressure." Editor, Newcastle Herald 13 December 2007

Discussions with council staff indicate that while councils can impose fines on people this is only done as a last resort and is rarely required as most people are compliant with the policy.

"Only three fines have been issued since the policy was introduced. All to recalcitrant and repeat offenders and following numerous warnings." Mosman Municipal Council

Community support

An important consideration before implementing any policy is to gauge how it will be received by the community. Surveys indicate that the Australian public supports making public outdoor areas smoke-free^{1,2}. A recent report also highlighted that the introduction of smoke-free policies lags behind community expectations³.

"It would appear that there is a growing mood that smoking in outdoor spaces around kids and playing sport is not acceptable." Newcastle Lord Mayor John Tate, Daily Telegraph 7 December 2007.

"In recognition of the change in community attitudes towards smoking, the overwhelming community support for smoke-free bans, especially in areas used by children and in support of a clean healthy environment, we recommend Member Councils of Hunter Councils Inc. adopt smoke-free outdoor area policies in playgrounds, sporting fields and beaches." Community Development & Social Planning Team, Hunter Councils Inc.

"The success of the smoke-free sporting grounds policy in Kiama has come from a joint commitment of the community and Council. Council was planning to investigate smoke-free outdoor areas but it has been the community who has made it happen and worked hard to ensure its success." Councillor Sandra McCarthy, Kiama Municipal Council.

"The introduction of smoke-free areas was as the result of a combination of community request, councillor interest and letters from other councils - in particular, Newcastle." Cessnock City Council

"I feel that the Council's smoke-free outdoor areas policy has been well accepted by the public and hope that other Councils follow suit as it is quite disappointing to attend other sporting events away from Kiama where you must tolerate smokers on the sideline as there is no law against it." Noelene Sinclair, Netball and soccer parent and President Gainsborough Netball Club.

Gaining support from sporting clubs

Sporting clubs understand the effect that smoking has on health and sporting performance. This has led to many approaching councils to introduce smoke-free policies.

"It is in the best interests of all sport players and their families." Russell Henry, Newcastle Football Club President. Daily Telegraph 7 December 2007

"Port Stephens Council's proposed smoking bans at outdoor facilities including sporting fields, beaches, swimming pools, parks and reserves have received unanimous support from the five Sports Councils across the area." Charlie Elias, Journalist, Fighter Force News 31 October 2008

"There is very good feedback from members of sporting clubs regarding public's compliance with the policy and how it is easy to point the signs out and get smokers to comply." Kiama Municipal Council

Business concerns

Outdoor dining or al fresco areas are important places to consider making smoke-free, but business owners can sometimes be resistant. The experiences of councils that have made al fresco areas smoke-free suggest that the bans are well accepted and appreciated.

"The bans have had no long term adverse affects on trading figures. Some care needs to be taken when informing our smoking patrons of the ban so as not to harm the good relationship we have with them. Generally our customers have a positive feeling towards the ban. We have found that a lot of our patrons feel this new ban will help them kick the habit."
Mr Hasan Erman Proprietor Manly Grill Seafood and Steakhouse and Rouge Mediterranean Cafe

"I have noticed a vast improvement since our café strips in Newcastle went smoke-free; just to be able to sit down and enjoy a coffee or meal in the open air without being choked by cigarette smoke." Councillor Ian McKenzie, Newcastle City Council.

Councillor awareness and support

Many councillors understand the benefits smoke-free outdoor areas offer to both the health of their community and the environment. Whilst there may be concerns that the community does not support such bans, in reality the opposite is often true.

"There was initially great skepticism amongst fellow councillors about how these smoking policies would be received and as such there was resistance to introduce them. Once introduced, there was unanimous support amongst the councillors as the overwhelming public popularity of the policies became apparent. Our community has wholeheartedly embraced these policies with a sense of civic pride." Councillor Andrew Brown, Mosman Municipal Council.

"It is important for councils to make a contribution to the health of the community. Working to ban smoking in outdoor areas is one way we can work with the community to improve the health of our citizens, including children." Bruce Petersen, Environmental Services Manager, Port Stephens Council.



Photo courtesy of
The Border Mail

"People shouldn't be allowed to smoke in areas where families gather – they shouldn't have to breathe in other people's smoke."

Doreen Kusternig - Wodonga. The Border Mail 26 July 2008

Signage

The cost of signage or lack of suitable templates is often raised as a challenge to introducing policy. Some councils have used low cost solutions to this barrier, while other councils have shared signage templates.

"Of course signage cost was an issue we had to consider. However in many cases cost can be minimised by the simple addition of no smoking symbols to existing ordinance signs at beaches, baths and pools." Councillor Barbara Gaudry, Newcastle City Council

To address this challenge the Smoke-free Outdoor Areas Resource Kit now includes a signage and policy template CD-ROM.

Geographical challenges

NSW councils differ greatly, from densely populated urban areas to rural communities with ample space. Whether coastal or inland, smoke-free outdoor areas have been introduced to a range of councils with differing characteristics and enjoy good compliance and support from the public.

Some rural councils have argued that because they are surrounded by open space, smoke-free outdoor areas are not relevant. This attitude is changing. In 2007 only 11 rural councils, out of a total of 109, had some form of smoke-free outdoor areas policy, yet by 2008 this had doubled to 22. Early indications are that in 2009 this figure will be even higher.

"The smoke-free playgrounds and sporting fields policy, whilst still in the early stages in Broken Hill, has been well received by the community. Council, Greater Western Area Health Service, sporting groups and parents have been keen to support the project. It is a proactive initiative in improving the health of our rural community." Broken Hill City Council

The usability of the Smoke-free Outdoor Areas Resource Kit

The Smoke-free Outdoor Areas Resource Kit was designed to provide council staff with all of the information available that is necessary to introduce smoke-free outdoor areas. A number of council representatives who had adopted outdoor smoke-free policies helped design the content so that it was as relevant and practical as possible.

"The kit was the reason that council implemented the policy and they used it as a template. The draft resolution was excellent and the kit made it look easy." Deniliquin Council

"The Resource Kit was very useful - a simple tool for persuasion that can be easily disseminated around council." Armidale Dumaresq Council

"Shellharbour City Council found the kit very useful in the development of their smoke-free policy for sports grounds and playgrounds. It would be a useful resource to any other council looking to develop a similar policy." Shellharbour City Council.

"The Resource Kit has assisted with the drafting of policy, as has discussion with other councils - in particular the recent meeting of the Western Group of Councils in Parkes." Broken Hill City Council

"The Resource Kit will be very useful when they take the further bans to councils. It means there is hardly any work for you to do and that's a good thing." Cessnock City Council

"The Resource Kit has taken a lot of the leg work out of introducing the policy. It allows council to refine the policy to suit their needs." Wollongong City Council

FOOTNOTES

1 The Manly Daily May 25 2007

2 Centre for Health Research and Psycho-oncology. Tracking NSW community attitudes and practices in relation to tobacco: A biennial telephone survey. March 2007. Unpublished report by Cancer Council NSW

3 Walsh et al. Is government action out-of-step with public opinion on tobacco control? Results of a New South Wales population survey. ANZJPH. 2008; 32:482-488.