Chapter 9

SunSmart policies and practices in Victorian local government, 2001

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Introduction

The SunSmart skin cancer control program is developed around theoretical models of behaviour change that include an important role for structural change in communities (Sinclair et al. 1994; Borland 1992). Physical and environmental resources and social norms, as well as predispositions, weather, and activity demands, contribute to behavioural causes of skin cancer (Hill & Boulter 1996).

Local government has a key role to play in supporting community efforts to reduce exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Its potential influence within communities includes setting standards for shade provision in public facilities; providing for the sun protection of employees, who in turn may be role models for the general public; and preparing and disseminating educational materials and programs. Local government activities include managing open space, such as parks and gardens, sports grounds, swimming pools and car parks; town planning, for buildings, streetscapes, footpaths, shopping malls, etc; employing staff, many of whom work outdoors; running recreational and educational programs for children and adults; and managing care and health services for children.

The SunSmart Community Program offers a wide range of support to local government in its efforts to encourage sun protection. Recent strategies include providing guides to assist Victorian local government councils to develop and implement sun protection policies (SunSmart 1998) and to assist with shade development for public places. The Community Program also provides their expertise in presentations, training workshops and seminars, and responds to requests for information. Materials such as display kits and speaker's kits assist councils in public education on skin cancer control. The program also advises on sun protection by publishing and distributing a community newsletter.

Periodically, SunSmart has sought to evaluate the progress made in building the capacity of local government to promote sun protection within their local community on sun-related activities. This study presents the results of a fourth survey of sun protection policies and practices of Victorian local government. Three earlier studies were conducted, the first in 1990 (Borland, Pratt & Noy 1994), the second in 1993 (Montague, Borland & Whitty 1995) and a third in 1998 (Dobbinson et al. 1999).

In monitoring the policies and practices of Victorian local government, it should be emphasised that councils themselves have been subject to a number of major changes over recent years (Dobbinson et al 1999). These include a major restructure of local government in 1993 from 210 to 78 municipalities and shires with proportionally fewer rural councils. Other significant changes include outsourcing council services since 1994–95 (OLG 1996), and the establishment of primary care partnerships (with one or two other councils and community health services) to enhance local level health service provision (DHS 2000). Moreover, changes to urban planning are also afoot with Rescode provisions for property development introduced in May 2001. Regular changes to local government also occur, including usual staff turnover and election of councillors.

The restructure to local government led to the establishment of a new baseline in 1998 for SunSmart's monitoring purposes. Prior to 1998 it was evident that policy development and other supports for skin cancer control had begun in a range of council services and facilities (Borland, Pratt & Noy 1994; Montague,

Borland & Whitty 1995; Dobbinson et al. 1999). This was particularly true for provisions for sun protection in children's programs and for outdoor workers. Some improvements in shade provision in parks and gardens had also been noted (see Dobbinson et al. 1999 for a summary of changes). These changes were generally more noticeable in the urban centres, which were perhaps better resourced or had addressed sun protection more comprehensively than rural councils.

In the 1998 survey, following the restructure to local government, few regressive features were noted. Apparent improvements in councils' policy development in relation to sun protection were seen for outdoor council staff (58%) and to council-run children's programs (92%) and contracted children's programs (41%). Actual practices also appeared to have been consolidated. The main setback was seen in policy to incorporate sun protection into contracted services but also in policy for shade provision in parks and gardens (dropping from 36% of councils in 1993 to 9% in 1998).

This chapter describes the results of the survey of local government in 2001 following the progress since 1998.

Method

Victorian municipalities

The councils were grouped into four categories based on the nature of the area serviced. These were inner metropolitan, metropolitan fringe, provincial or rural municipalities. Classification was based on location, population size and density; sources were the Local Government Guide (MAV 1998), the Victorian Yearbook (Jackson 1998) and the Melway Melbourne street directory.

Inner metropolitan councils are entirely urban in nature and occur only in Melbourne. Municipalities categorised as metropolitan fringe are those with areas at the edge of urban areas of Melbourne where new development is greatest and also the greater Geelong Council. Provincial municipalities are those outside the metropolitan area with at least one town or city with a population of more than 10,000 people. Rural municipalities are rural in nature with no substantial urban centre. Table 9.1 shows the distribution of councils by area. One new council was established (Docklands) since the previous survey.

Table 9.1 Distribution of councils by area

	1998–2001	
	n	%
Rural	35	45
Provincial	11	14
Fringe metro	14	18
Inner metro*	18	23
Total	78	100

** Increased to n=19 councils by 2001.*

Data collection

As in previous years all municipalities were invited to participate in the survey. A detailed questionnaire was sent to the chief executive officer of each municipality. Environmental health officers and either a community services officer or health promotion officer were also sent a copy of the questionnaire. A letter of endorsement from the Municipal Authority of Victoria urging councils to participate in the survey was included. The

surveys were distributed in early March 2001. A follow-up of all councils was made to ensure the survey was received and to encourage participation. Completed surveys were returned by the end of June 2001.

Response rates

Seventy-nine councils were mailed questionnaires and 65 councils returned a completed questionnaire. The response rate of 82% for the 2001 survey was slightly lower than in 1998 (86%). Eight councils directly refused to participate due mainly to workload, another six councils were not able to complete the survey within the follow-up period.

Table 9.2 shows the response rate by area. The response rate for provincial councils was higher than for rural and urban councils. Compared to the previous survey, more rural councils and less inner metropolitan councils participated in 2001.

Table 9.2 Response rates of local government authorities as function of type of council

	Inner metropolitan n=19	Fringe metropolitan n=14	Provincial n=11	Rural n=35	Overall n=79
Returned	14	12	10	29	65
Refusals/too busy	1	1	1	5	8
Not able to respond in time	4	1	–	1	6
Response rate (%)	74%	86%	91%	83%	82%

Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was based on previous surveys and broadly covered council parks and gardens and other recreational facilities, outdoor staff, council programs for children, council community programs, and programs with other agencies in relation to sun protection policies and practices (Borland, Pratt & Noy 1994; Montague, Borland & Whitty 1995; Dobbinson et al. 1999). Two new items were developed for the 2001 survey, to assess consideration of skin cancer control in newly formed Community Health Plans and shade in town planning. The changes introduced in 1998 to incorporate the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for local government services was continued in the 2001 survey.

As in previous years the survey itself was divided into discrete sections so that the appropriate departments in the council could complete the questionnaire. A survey coordinator's sheet was enclosed to assist with the collation of the completed questionnaire and ensure someone was responsible for its return. Table 9.3 summarises the departments completing the various sections of the survey.

Table 9.3 Summary of departments completing each section of the survey

Department	Survey coordinator	Parks section	Outdoor staff section	Children's programs section	Swimming pool & community programs section	Programs with other agencies section
Health services	52%	5%	3%	6%	6%	20%
Children services/ youth & recreation services	0%	14%	2%	42%	42%	5%
Community services	22%	0	0	6%	0	6%
Parks & gardens	0%	25%	5%	0%	3%	0%
Works & infrastructure	3%	25%	34%	3%	11%	5%
Occupational health & safety	5%	3%	12%	3%	2%	0%
Human resources	3%	0	11%	0	0	0
Corporate services/ finance & admin.	6%	3%	5%	3%	2%	3%
Other	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	0
Missing	8%	23%	28%	34%	32%	62%

Analysis

This study provides descriptive data on the prevalence of sun protection policies and practices in local government councils and shires in Victoria. Differences by area were assessed on key data using either the chi-square statistic for categorical data and the t-test and one-way analysis of variance for comparison of means. Statistical analysis of trends in policy and practice are not presented in the main report. The survey data most closely represent an 'audit' of councils and shires in 1998 and 2001 rather than either 'independent' samples or 'repeated' dependent samples.

We would expect that an audit would provide relatively accurate estimates of change in policy and practice given high response rates in each survey. However, the data rely on the reports of staff across a number of departments within each organisation, and are likely subject to staff turnover and other changes to organisation structure over the survey interval. A matched pairs analysis of key policy data from 57 councils and shires completing surveys in both 1998 and 2001 suggests there may be considerable variability in responses for an organisation when relying on reports completed by different people and departments. These results suggest trend data should be interpreted with caution.

Missing data

The survey was a lengthy one and each section contained a large number of questions. In addition various people completed different sections of the questionnaire. The percentage of missing data on key policy or program questions from each section included 15% on health and municipal plans, 6% on parks, 25% on outdoor staff, 9% on pools, 26% on children's programs and 23% on community programs. Results are reported as proportions of the total of councils completing a questionnaire, n=65 in the denominator, unless otherwise stated.

Results

Municipal Public Health Plans

Sixty-nine per cent of councils reported they had a Municipal Public Health Plan, up from 52% in 1998. Approximately half of these councils (49%) had included policies on sun protection in their plans. Twenty-three per cent of councils were developing a municipal health plan with 47% indicating their plan would include sun protection. Overall 45% of councils had a health plan or were developing one with a component on sun protection (up from 37% in 1998).

Community Health Plans

In addition to a plan for the local area, many councils are now forming Primary Care Partnerships with Community Health Plans being developed for the planning and implementation of services for the population in their greater area. This process is just beginning and we asked whether sun protection was being addressed in the development of these plans. Only 3% of councils had completed their Community Health Plan, 65% were in the process of developing one, 25% reported they were yet to start and 8% did not respond. One of the two councils with a Community Health Plan had included a component on sun protection. Of the 42 councils with a plan currently in development, under one-third (29%) were intending to include sun protection.

Shade in parks, gardens and other council controlled facilities

Parks and gardens in Victoria are widely used for recreational activities, particularly over the summer months. Shade in parks and gardens continues to be important for reducing exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation during recreational pursuits.

The majority of councils have a large number of parks and gardens to manage. In 2001 the majority of councils (55%) reported they had 40 or more parks and gardens under their jurisdiction. Rural councils generally had fewer parks and gardens than councils in more populated areas (76% of rural councils and 30% of provincial councils had 'less than 40' parks and gardens, while 86% of metropolitan and 83% of metropolitan fringe councils had 'more than 40' parks and gardens; $X^2=40.8$, df=9, p=.000).

Councils' efforts to improve shade in park and gardens

The majority of councils have some dissatisfaction with levels of shade in the parks and gardens they manage, with just under one-third of councils (32% in 2001 and 33% in 1998) indicating they were satisfied with the current levels of shade. This may well have been an important driver of efforts to improve shade levels in parks and gardens in recent years. Supporting this assumption is an increase in the proportion of councils reporting efforts to improve shade in their parks and gardens over the past three years (see Table 9.4). Improvements include an increase in policy on providing shade in parks and gardens in councils from 9% in 1998 to 25% in 2001. The low levels of policy in 1998 may be attributed mainly to the major restructure of local government in 1996 and a lower priority for shade in parks and gardens during that transitionary phase.

In addition to policy development, it appears that more councils had built new roof structures in parks and gardens for shade (51% of councils in 2001 cf. 40% in 1998) and more councils had plans for planting trees specifically for shade in the future (28% in 2001 cf. 24% in 1998). Nonetheless, there was a drop in the proportion of councils planting trees for shade in the past three years (46% in 2001 cf. 49% in 1998). Of the councils with recent substantial tree plantings (n=30), 40% had planted trees mostly or all for shade,

37% had planted both equally trees in thickets and spread out for shade, and 17% had planted trees mostly in thickets.

Table 9.4 Councils' efforts to improve shade provision in parks and gardens in 1998 and 2001

	1998	2001
Policy		
Councils with policy on shade in parks & gardens	9%	25%
Recent efforts to increase shade (past 3 years) …		
With new roof structures with good shade	40%	51%
With replacement roof structures	5%	6%
With new tree plantings	49%	46%
Future plans to increase shade …		
With new tree plantings specifically for shade	24%	28%

Interestingly, councils' assessments of shade provided by roofed structures also indicated less satisfaction with shade levels than in the past. Fewer councils (88% in 2001 cf. 96% in 1998) reported they had roofed structures providing 'good shade' in at least one of their parks and gardens in 2001. In addition to the increase in councils reporting they had plans to plant new trees specifically for shade, there was also a drop in the proportion of councils with no plans to plant new trees (19% of councils in 2001 cf. 27% in 1998).

Councils were also asked more generally to assess whether shade levels in their parks and gardens had changed over the past three years. Thirty-seven per cent of councils thought there was now more shade in their parks and gardens compared to three years ago, while over half (52%) thought there was about the same shade.

Extent of shade in parks and gardens

We also asked councils to estimate the actual level of shade provided in their parks and gardens. Councils provided an estimate of the average proportion of their parks and gardens with high, moderate, and inadequate levels of shade (Table 9.5). In 2001 an average of 78% of councils' parks and gardens were assessed as having 'at least moderate' levels of shade. These estimates were similar to in 1998 at an average of 77% of parks and gardens.

However, assessments of the proportion of parks and gardens with 'high levels' of shade appear to have decreased slightly from an average of 42% in 1998 to 38% in 2001. In contrast estimates of the proportion of parks and gardens with 'inadequate levels' of shade declined slightly (23% in 2001 cf. 25% in 1998).

An improvement in shade levels in parks and gardens would be expected given we have reported ongoing planting of new trees for shade over several years (Montague & Borland & Whitty 1995; Dobbinson et al. 1999). Nonetheless, other factors may affect actual shade levels. For example, tree plantings may have been 'limited' and it is likely there would be a 'time-lag' for trees to mature sufficiently to provide shade. Shade might also be diminished through vandals and bush fires or natural ageing. Nonetheless, as in previous surveys, few councils reported needing to build replacement roof structures (7% in 2001 cf. 5% in 1998).

Table 9.5 Councils' assessment of actual shade levels in their parks and gardens

	1998	2001
Extent of shade		
Average % of parks with high levels of shade	42% (SD=26)	38% (SD=29)
Average % of parks with at least moderate levels of shade	77% (SD=19)	78% (SD=19)
Average % of parks with inadequate shade	25% (SD=18)	23% (SD=19)
Satisfaction with current levels of shade in council parks & gardens	33%	32%
Perceived change		
Now more than 3 years ago	30%	37%

Note: Excludes up to 22% of councils in 2001 and 16% of councils in 1998 not providing estimates.

Regional differences in shade provision

Table 9.6 provides a summary of the difference in the extent of shade and strategies implemented to improve shade in parks and gardens by area. The mean estimates of the percentage of parks and gardens with high, moderate or inadequate shade were not significantly different by area ($F=0.8$, $df=3$, $p=.507$; $F=0.3$, $df=3$, $p=.854$; $F=2.5$,$df=3$, $p=.068$; respectively, and at least moderate levels $F=1.1$, $df=3$, $p=.353$). Nonetheless, the data suggest that shade was more limited in areas on the metropolitan fringe. This would be expected given these would include local government areas where new housing estates were recently developed compared to more established parks and gardens in other areas. It was encouraging to see that councils in the metropolitan fringe areas were more likely to have developed a sun protection policy for their parks and gardens ($X^2=9.5$, $df=3$, $p=.024$). In addition councils on the city fringe were more likely to have planted substantial numbers of trees in the past three years ($X^2=17.2$, $df=6$, $p=.009$) and have plans for future tree plantings ($X^2=28.5$, $df=9$, $p=.001$) compared to most councils in other areas.

In contrast, it would appear that shade is readily available in most parks and gardens in provincial and rural areas where parks and gardens are more established. Moreover, councils in rural areas have been less active in tree planting and building of roof structures for parks and gardens over the past three years. Similarly, in 1998 councils in rural areas were less likely to have planted new trees for shade. Inner metropolitan councils were also less likely to have built new roof structures for shade ($X^2=21.2$, $df=9$, $p=.012$).

Table 9.6 Councils provision for shade in parks and gardens by area

	Inner metro n=14	Metro fringe n=12	Provincial n=10	Rural n=29	Overall n=65
Policy					
Councils with policy on shade in parks & gardens*	7%	58%	20%	21%	25%
Extent of shade					
Average % of parks with high levels of shade (n=53)	39% (SD=32)	25% (SD=21)	46% (SD=34)	40% (SD=28)	38% (SD=29)
Average % of parks with moderate levels of shade (n=54)	37% (SD=20)	44% (SD=10)	39% (SD=20)	42% (SD=26)	41% (SD=22)
Average % of parks with inadequate shade (n=51)	26% (SD=24)	33% (SD=19)	27% (SD=16)	16% (SD=15)	23% (SD=19)
Average % of parks with at least moderate levels of shade (n=52)	76% (SD=24)	69% (SD=19)	75% (SD=16)	82% (SD=17)	78% (SD=19)
Perceived level of shade					
Now more*	43%	58%	30%	28%	37%
About the same	36%	17%	70%	69%	52%
Recent efforts to increase shade (past 3 years)...					
With new tree plantings**	64%	75%	50%	24%	46%
Built new roof structures for shade*	43%	75%	50%	45%	51%
Future plans to increase shade...					
With plans for new plantings specifically for shade**	21%	50%	50%	14%	28%

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Permanent sun protection signage in parks and gardens

Councils were asked whether they provided permanent signage to encourage sun protection practices in their parks and gardens. Only 14% of councils reported their parks and gardens had any signage to encourage people's sun-protective behaviours.

Shade provided at other council controlled facilities

Table 9.7 shows the proportion of councils with high levels of shade at various council controlled facilities in 2001 and 1998. Councils' reports of shade levels suggest there has been some activity in the last three years to improve shade at a number of these facilities. Furthermore, 66% of councils reported a range of specific shade development projects that had been carried out in these facilities during the last three years. For example, of the 43 councils that reported increasing shade in these facilities, 28% reported

shade improvements at kindergartens and childcare facilities and 30% had improved shade at and around swimming pool facilities.

Table 9.7 Councils with high levels of shade in various facilities

	1998	2001
Child care centres	28%	40%
Pre-schools & kindergartens	36%	39%
Play equipment in parks	3%	2%
Wading pools	37%	48%
Areas around swimming pools	28%	29%
Spectator areas around sporting facilities	3%	3%
Public seats & bus stops	5%	9%
Footpaths and other open areas in shopping centres or malls	0%	2%

Note: n=65.

Shade as a component of planning and infrastructure development

In the past year SunSmart has begun to assess the extent to which urban planning legislation can be used to promote sun-protective environments at the local level. In 2001 councils were asked whether shade development was a criteria for approval of planning permits in a range of settings. This baseline data (Table 9.8) shows that sun protection was incorporated in the town planning approval process in only a limited proportion of councils.

Table 9.8 Use of shade criteria in planning permit approvals

	Yes	No	Don't know	Not applicable
Industrial estates	9%	68%	9%	2%
Non-residential developments	26%	52%	9%	0%
Residential subdivisions	15%	63%	9%	0%
Residential single dwelling	11%	63%	11%	3%

Note: n=65. Difference to 100% sum are missing values.

Councils were also asked to assess more generally whether shade development was a criterion for council plans when developing facilities. Comparing the data from Tables 9.8 & 9.9 would suggest that shade was more commonly considered in planning in general than specifically in formal planning processes.

Table 9.9 Inclusion of shade criteria in council infrastructure development plans

	Yes	No	Don't know	Not applicable
New neighbourhoods	19%	49%	8%	9%
Streetscapes	51%	28%	5%	2%
Public open spaces	57%	23%	2%	2%
Play equipment in parks	55%	17%	5%	6%
Child care centres, preschools & kindergartens	43%	20%	8%	11%
Sports facilities	40%	34%	9%	2%
Bike and footpaths	15%	52%	6%	8%

Note: n=65. Difference to 100% sum are missing values.

Provision for outdoor workers' sun protection

The following section describes the results of the survey relating to local government policies and practices for outdoor workers' sun protection. Outdoor council workers were defined as including staff working outdoors for 'all' or 'part of' the day, either 'regularly' or 'occasionally' (including gardening staff, road workers, engineers, holiday program staff running outdoor activities and swimming pool staff etc.). These staff may work either as council employees or workers engaged under contract agreements.

In 2001 the majority of councils (83%) 'directly employed' at least some outdoor workers while 65% of councils engaged at least some staff 'by contract'. More councils in 2001 appear to have 'all' or 'most' of their outdoor workers employed directly as compared to 1998 (72% cf. 67%).

In this section, outdoor workers employed by council are referred to as 'employees', while outdoor workers engaged by contract are referred to as 'contract workers'. The following data in relation to policy and practice for outdoor workers are generally reported by proportions of councils with 'at least some employees' (n=54) and with 'at least some contract workers' (n=42), while items on sun protection policy are also reported 'overall' councils (n=65).

Development of a sun protection policy for outdoor staff

Table 9.10 summarises policy development specific to provision of outdoor workers' sun protection in 1998 and 2001. Seventy-six per cent of councils with at least some 'council employees' had developed a formal sun protection policy for their outdoor workers. Seven per cent were currently developing a sun protection policy and 17% had not yet made plans to develop such a policy for their council employed staff.

Although the development of sun protection policies for contract workers was still lower than that for employees, there appears to be an improvement since 1998. In 2001, 26% of councils with 'contract workers' had a sun protection policy for these workers as compared with 14% in 1998. Moreover, 17% of councils with at least some contract workers were currently developing such a policy and only 33% reported they had no plans to develop a sun protection policy as compared to 80% in 1998.

Overall 68% of councils had a sun protection policy for either employees or contract workers as compared with 54% of councils in 1998.

Table 9.10 Proportion of councils with a sun protection policy for outdoor workers in place for council employees, contract workers or overall

Policy in place	For employees[1]	For contract workers[2]	For either employees or contract workers[3]
1998	58%	14%	54%
2001	76%	26%	68%

[1] *Of those with at least some council employed outdoor workers.*
[2] *Of those with at least some contract outdoor workers.*
[3] *Overall councils.*

The development of sun protection policies for outdoor workers was similar across council areas in 2001.

Sun protection policy details

Councils' sun protection policies contain a range of strategies to promote workers' sun protection. Table 9.11 provides an overview of the strategies commonly addressed in such policy. The data are presented in relation to council employees and contract workers separately. Comparison by survey year is difficult given councils varied contracting of outdoor workers over time. Nevertheless, within these limitations, it appears there was an increase in councils specifying provision of sun protection items for employees, scheduling activities outside peak UV radiation periods and providing information to employees.

For contract workers the overall level of policy in existence for sun protection (included as specific requirements in tender documents) improved from 1998 but was still low. Of the councils with such a policy, 'provision of sun protection items' was the strategy area most commonly specified (see Table 9.11).

Table 9.11 Councils with other specific strategies mentioned in their sun protection policy by survey year

	Policy for council employees		Policy for contract workers	
	1998	**2001**	**1998**	**2001**
	n=60	**n=54**	**n=44**	**n=42**
Provision of sun protection items (in general)	58%	76%	11%	21%
Broad-brimmed or legionnaire-style hats	20%	57%	–	14%
Sunscreen	35%	59%	7%	12%
Sunglasses	10%	33%	5%	2%
Long-sleeved shirts	22%	33%	5%	10%
Long trousers	15%	24%	2%	2%
Scheduling activities outside peak UV radiation periods	13%	33%	0%	7%
Advice or educational material	37%	46%	2%	19%

Evaluation of policy

The majority of councils with a formal sun protection policy (76% of those with policy for employees and 91% of councils with policy for contract workers) monitored the implementation of the policy.

An indication of the type of monitoring undertaken was given by some councils involved in implementing such policy. Thirteen councils reported who was responsible for monitoring the implementation of such policy for employees. Occupational health and safety staff (31%), occupational health and safety committees (31%), and supervisors or team leaders of outdoor staff (31%) most commonly undertook this monitoring. Twenty-two councils mentioned a variety of methods used for this monitoring with annual review of policy implementation the most common (32%). Other strategies mentioned included occupational health and safety and staff meetings, and site visits and inspections.

Ten councils described the type of monitoring of policy for contract workers. These councils commonly used random checks, field visits or audits. Other monitoring methods mentioned included meetings with their contractor or other contractual compliance procedures.

Encouragement of outdoor workers' sun protection

In contrast to policies per se, the next section describes reports of what was 'actually being done' in relation to support for outdoor workers' sun protection.

Table 9.12 summarises councils' responses regarding whether 'outdoor staff were encouraged to take precautions to protect themselves from the sun when working outdoors in summer (e.g. to wear hats, shirts, or SPF 15 or higher sunscreen and to stay in the shade where possible)'. This question was asked only in relation to council employees.

Ninety-three per cent of councils with at least some council employees who work outdoors (n=54) encouraged 'all staff' to protect themselves, while a further 4% encouraged 'some staff' to protect themselves. This was a similar level of encouragement of staff sun protection as in 1998.

Table 9.12 Encouragement of sun protection for outdoor staff by survey year

	Council † employees	
	1998 n=60	**2001 n=54**
All staff encouraged to protect themselves	92%	93%
Some staff encouraged to protect themselves	2%	4%
No	3%	2%
Missing	3%	2%

† *Not asked for contract workers.*

Provision for outdoor workers' sun protection

Table 9.13 describes the range of provisions councils have made to support outdoor workers' sun protection in recent years. These data relate to questions asked about councils' provision for 'all' or 'some' of their staff's sun protection, in terms of personal protective items and other strategies such as providing portable shade, rescheduling work outdoors at peak UV radiation periods and providing education on skin cancer.

Table 9.13 Provision for at least some outdoor workers sun protection by survey year

	Council employees		Contract workers	
	1998	2001	1998	2001
	n=60	n=54	n=44	n=42
Sun-protective items supplied to workers:				
Broad-brimmed or legionnaire-style hats	97%	94%	66%	45%
Other hats	53%	59%	46%	31%
Sunscreen	95%	98%	64%	48%
Long-sleeved shirts	83%	94%	61%	41%
Trousers	88%	96%	59%	41%
Portable shade (umbrellas, tents, canopies for tractors) 'sometimes' or 'when needed'	58%	56%	41%	43%
Activities scheduled to limit time working in the sun 11 am–3 pm	35%	46%	16%	31%
Advice or educational materials relating to skin care provided or displayed	80%	80%	52%	50%

As in 1998, in 2001 many councils supplied a range of sun-protective items for employees working outdoors. The provision of advice and information on skin care was also commonly given. It was encouraging to see further improvements in the supply of long-sleeved shirts and trousers. More councils in 2001 compared with 1998 appear to schedule work to limit time outside in the peak UV radiation periods; this practice is still less common than others.

Over the past three years it appears there has been a decline in the proportion of councils ensuring personal sun-protective items and portable shade are supplied for contract workers. Councils less often supplied sun-protective items to their contract workers. Of councils indicating who provided these items for contract workers (n=21), 38% left the supply of these items to the contractors, 38% were the sole providers of these items and 24% of these councils shared the supply with their contractors.

Provision for sun protection at children's programs

Local governments provide a variety of services for children, including holiday programs, daycare, childcare, kindergarten and other programs. The questionnaire asked about the existence and content of sun protection policies for these programs.

Some programs for children are now operated by way of tendered contracts. In 2001, 49% of councils conducted all of their children's programs, 9% of councils had mostly council operated programs, 14% had about half, 5% had mostly contract programs and 11% had all contract programs. This was similar to in 1998.

The following data in relation to sun protection policies for children's programs are reported by proportions of councils with 'at least some' *council operated* programs (77%, n=50), councils with 'at least some' *contract run* programs (39%, n=25), and 'overall' councils (n=65).

Policy or procedures for children's programs

Eighty-four per cent of councils with 'at least some' council operated children's programs had a policy or set of procedures that specifically dealt with sun protection in *council operated* children's programs. Such policies and procedures appear to be less common among councils than in 1998 (92%). In contrast there was a slight improvement in the proportion of councils that had developed sun protection policies or procedures for *contract run* children's programs. In 2001 56% of councils with 'at least some' *contract run* children's programs had sun protection policies or procedures in place compared with 41% in 1998. Although the existence of a policy appears to have been more common amongst metropolitan councils than councils in rural or provincial areas; both for council and contracted children's programs (see Table 9.14), these differences were not statistically significant (X^2=7.2, df=6, p=.303 and X^2=9.4, df=6, p=.151 respectively).

Overall 72% of councils had a sun protection policy or procedures in place for either *council operated* or *contract run* children's programs as compared with 75% of councils in 1998.

Table 9.14 Percentage of councils developed sun protection policies or procedures for children's programs by area of council

	Inner metropolitan	Fringe metropolitan	Provincial municipality	Rural	Overall
Council operated	**n=12**	**n=10**	**n=8**	**n=20**	**n=50**
Policy in place	100%	90%	75%	75%	84%
No policy	0%	10%	13%	20%	12%
Missing	0%	0%	13%	5%	4%
Contract run	**n=5**	**n=6**	**n=4**	**n=10**	**n=25**
Policy in place	80%	67%	50%	40%	56%
No policy	0%	33%	0%	20%	16%
Missing	20%	0%	50%	40%	28%

Type of programs for which this applies

Councils were asked for which of their children's programs this set of procedures or policies applied. For *council operated* children's programs these policies or procedures were more often applied to childcare programs. Nonetheless, the general reduction in policies for *council operated* children's programs since 1998 appears to have occurred across each type of program. In contrast, policy for the various types of *contract run* children's programs has been relatively stable but remains low.

Table 9.15 Percentage of councils with specific programs covered by sun protection policies, by survey year

	Council operated		Contract run	
	1998	2001	1998	2001
	n=51	n=50	n=29	n=25
Holiday programs	53%	34%	21%	24%
Daycare programs	63%	46%	31%	32%
Childcare programs	77%	62%	31%	32%
Kindergartens	57%	42%	28%	28%

Specific areas addressed in policies or procedures

Councils with policies for *council operated* children's programs (n=42) were asked about the specific areas included in the policy or set of procedures. The majority of these policies or procedures addressed a range of areas (see Table 9.16). The encouragement of individual sun-protective items, the scheduling of activities to limit time outdoors between 11 am and 3 pm, the provision of advice or educational materials relating to skin cancer, and the provision of portable shade were commonly specified in policy. The monitoring of the implementation of these policies and procedures was also commonly specified.

A similar question was asked of councils with *contract run* children's programs (n=14). Although a range of areas were generally specified by the majority of councils in their policies or procedures for *contract run* programs, the inclusion of encouragement of individual sun-protective items was certainly more common than the other strategies mentioned.

There appears to have been little change since 1998 in strategy areas mentioned in the policies and procedures for both *council operated* and *contract run* children's programs overall. Nonetheless, there was a small drop in councils specifying advice or education in policy over the past three years for policies relating to both *council operated* and *contract run* programs. In addition, in 2001, provision of sun-protective items was not made in one council's policies and procedures for contract run children's programs compared with inclusion in all such policies in 1998.

Table 9.16 Specific strategies mentioned in sun protection policies and procedures for children's programs by survey year

	Policy for council operated		Policy for contract run	
	1998	2001	1998	2001
	n=47	n=42	n=12	n=14
Encouragement of use of sun-protective items (e.g. hats, long-sleeved shirts, SPF 15+ sunscreen)	96%	100%	100%	93%
Scheduling activities to limit time outside during peak UV radiation periods	88%	88%	75%	79%
Provision of portable shade, tents	60%	57%	50%	50%
Advice or educational material (displays, seminars) on skin cancer	73%	64%	58%	50%
Monitoring of implementation	83%	86%	50%	50%

Provision for sun protection at swimming pools

Number and type of swimming pools owned or controlled

Overall, councils controlled or owned between none and 13 swimming pools, at an average (mean) of four pools. Councils in provincial areas controlled more pools (mean=6.5) than councils in other areas (mean=3.2 inner metropolitan, mean=3.3 fringe, and mean=3.4 rural; F=5.2, df=3, p=.003).

Table 9.17 shows the type of pools councils had by area, excluding data from four councils who did not complete this section of the questionnaire. The majority of councils (59%) had a mix of outdoor and indoor pools under their control and over one-third had only outdoor pool facilities. Councils in rural areas compared with other areas were more likely to have only outdoor pools (X^2=23.9, df=3, p<.001).

A similar proportion of councils reported they controlled or owned outdoor swimming pools in 2001 (88%) as in 1998 (86%).

Table 9.17 Type of swimming pools controlled/owned by council area

	Inner metropolitan n=12	Fringe metropolitan n=12	Provincial municipality n=10	Rural n=27	Overall n=61
All outdoor pools	8%	8%	10%	67%	34%
Some outdoor and indoor pools	83%	92%	90%	22%	59%
All indoor pools	8%	0	0	7%	5%
No pool	0%	0%	0%	4%	2%

6% (n=4) Missing data.

Shade provided at pool facilities

In 2001 the majority of councils that owned or controlled outdoor pools provided high levels of shade for 'at least some' wading/toddler pools (93%) and areas surrounding swimming pools (95%). Moreover, 53% of councils with outdoor pools reported they had high levels of shade for 'all' of their wading/toddler pools and 32% had high levels of shade for 'all' areas surrounding swimming pools (similar to 1998). In contrast, councils have rarely provided high levels of shade over swimming pools. Forty-six per cent of councils with outdoor pools provided shade over 'at least some' of their swimming pools and only 9% of councils provided high levels of shade over 'all' their swimming pools.

Table 9.18 shows there has been a small increase in the proportion of councils with outdoor pools reporting they had high levels of shade for 'all' their wading/toddler pools. The increase was also relevant in relation to councils with high levels of shade in 'at least some' wading/toddler pools (93% in 2001 cf. 83% in 1998). In addition there was a small increase in councils reporting high levels of shade over swimming pools. The increase applied both to councils providing high levels of shade for 'all' their swimming pools (9% in 2001 cf. 3% in 1998) and to councils providing high levels of shade for 'at least some' of their swimming pools (46% in 2001 cf. 29% in 1998). Nonetheless, there was little change in councils providing shade for 'all' (32% in 2001 cf. 33% in 1998) or 'at least some' (95% in 2001 cf. 93% in 1998) areas around swimming pools.

Table 9.18 Proportion of councils with *high levels* of shade in 'all' pool facilities of each of the following types (of councils with outdoor pools)

	1998	2001
	n=58	n=57
Wading pools	43%	53%
Areas around swimming pools	33%	32%
Over swimming pools	3%	9%

Sun protection policies for swimming pools

Councils were asked whether there were any sun protection policies for swimming pools they ran, owned, or controlled. Despite the high risk of UV radiation exposure at swimming pools, few councils had developed a sun protection policy for outdoor pools they owned or controlled. Of the councils with an outdoor pool in 2001, 37% reported having such a policy, compared with 19% in 1998.

Table 9.19 Proportion of councils with sun protection policies for their swimming pools (of councils with outdoor pools)

	1998	2001
	n=58	n=57
Policy in place	19%	37%
No policy	81%	61%
Missing	0%	2%

Details of policy

Councils' policies (n=21) most commonly specified the provision of sun-protective uniforms for staff (86%) and the encouragement of staff to warn children to protect themselves from the sun (71%). The scheduling of programmed activities at times other than 11 am to 3 pm (38%) and the provision of portable shade (43%) were less often included in sun protection policies that were developed. In addition, the majority of councils with a sun protection policy for swimming pools reported they monitored the policy implementation.

Table 9.20 shows changes in strategies specified in sun protection policies for swimming pools. It appears monitoring of policy, active encouragement of children's sun protection and provision of sun-protective uniforms for staff are now more commonly specified in such policies compared with in 1998.

Table 9.20 Details specified in sun protection policies for swimming pools

	1998	2001
	n=11	n=21
Provision of sun-protective uniforms for staff	73%	86%
Provision of portable shade (e.g. large umbrellas)	27%	43%
Scheduling programmed activities for children and adolescents to limit time outdoors between 11 am and 3 pm	36%	38%
Staff encouraged to warn children to protect themselves if 'seen not to be'	36%	71%
Monitoring of implementation	64%	71%

Other encouragement of patrons' sun protection

Over half of councils (56%) with a kiosk at their outdoor swimming pools (n=46) supplied sun-protective items such as hats, long-sleeved shirts and maximum protection sunscreen at these sale points.

Solariums in council facilities

Councils were asked whether any of their swimming pools or other recreational facilities has a solarium. The vast majority of councils in 2001 reported they did not have this potentially hazardous source of UV radiation at council facilities. Nonetheless, while few councils (3%) directly admitted their council facilities had a solarium, a further 16% were uncertain or did not indicate whether their council facilities had a solarium of not. This suggests a slight improvement compared with councils' reports of solariums at facilities in 1998.

Table 9.21 Councils with a solarium in any recreational facilities

	1998	2001
	n=67	n=65
Yes	9%	3%
No	70%	82%
Don't know	10%	8%
Missing	10%	8%

Totals do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Council community programs

In 2001 as in previous surveys, councils were asked if council staff conducted any community health promotion programs which included a component on sun protection. It appears fewer councils included a sun protection component in such programs in 2001 compared with in 1998 (34% in 2001 cf. 48% in 1998).

Table 9.22 shows inner metropolitan councils had the most community programs with a component on sun protection followed by councils in provincial, metropolitan fringe and rural areas. This has varied somewhat over time. In 1998 provincial councils were most likely to have included a component on sun protection in their community health promotion programs (41% inner metropolitan, 58% fringe, 70% provincial, 39% rural).

Table 9.22 Community health promotion programs with a component on sun protection by council area

	Inner metropolitan n=14	Fringe metropolitan n=12	Provincial municipality n=10	Rural n=29	Overall n=65
Had a component on sun protection in any community programs	64%	42%	40%	14%	34%

Table 9.23 shows the percentage of councils with staff participating in various activities promoting sun protection to the public. As with community health promotion programs overall, few councils had run any specific health promotion activities promoting sun protection to the public. Provision of displays at council facilities, talks given to the public, distributing sun protection products and scheduling of programs for the public outside peak UV radiation periods were generally limited to between one-fifth and under one-third of councils.

Table 9.23 Proportion of councils overall included specific sun protection activities in any of their community programs

	1998	2001
	n=67	n=65
Providing displays at council facilities	40%	31%
Giving talks by council staff to the public	18%	17%
Providing sun protection aids to the public	27%	25%
Scheduling activities for council programs outside high risk periods	18%	20%

Nineteen councils commented on how these activities came about. These activities were initiated most commonly by staff (53%), and through ongoing practice (42%). Not one council attributed their sun protection or community health promotion activities to formal policy; this is in contrast to 13% of councils in 1998.

Forty-six per cent of councils said their staff participated in promoting sun protection in other programs such as festivals, shows, youth and recreation programs. This was also a reduction in councils' promotion of sun protection compared with 1998 (51%). The type of strategies used to promote sun protection in these other programs mentioned by these councils included: providing lots of shade (70%), scheduling activities outside peak UV radiation periods (40%), advising staff to protect themselves (93%) and advising the public to protect themselves (80%).

Council programs run with other agencies

Programs with other agencies

The final section of the questionnaire asked councils whether programs were planned or in operation with other agencies (excluding council controlled contracts) which specifically related to encouraging sun protection. Table 9.24 shows few councils were involved in cooperative sun protection programs with other agencies. Overall there was little change in the proportion of councils participating in collaborative initiatives.

Table 9.24 Percentage of councils actually collaborating with other agencies on sun protection programs

	Programs planned		Programs operating	
	1998 n=67	2001 n=65	1998 n=67	2001 n=65
Schools	5%	3%	9%	8%
Community health centres	10%	11%	10%	8%
Parks, foreshore and other authorities	3%	5%	3%	0%
Swimming pools not run by council	9%	8%	10%	12%
Crèches and kindergartens not run by council	5%	3%	18%	11%
Divisions of general practice	3%	8%	5%	3%

The councils working with other agencies on programs to encourage sun protection described a range of activities that were currently operating or being planned. The programs included: spot check clinics, various shade development initiatives, policy development for sun protection, incorporating sun protection at special events such as Fun Days at pools, awareness-raising in various settings such as workplaces and during Rural Health Week, and initiatives with Primary Care Partnerships.

Opportunities to further develop collaborative programs

Councils were asked whether they saw opportunities to develop or further such collaborative programs with other agencies in the future. Thirty-one per cent of councils indicated there were further opportunities to collaborate with other agencies (34% in 1998). A few councils indicated which other agencies they would likely work with to further develop such collaborative programs. Those mentioned were Primary Care Partnerships, community health centres, swimming pools, day care centres, crèches and kindergartens.

An overview of policy development

The development of policy formalises councils' commitment to ensuring adequate resources and education for sun protection of local communities within their influence. Table 9.25 summarises the key changes in policy development in specific settings over time.

Table 9.25 Percentage of councils with existing policy or plans to develop policy

	1998	2001
With sun protection included in their Municipal Public Health Plan	37%	45%
With shade policy for parks and gardens	9%	25%
With outdoor swimming pool policy	19%	37%[1]
With outdoor staff policy in place	54% (58%[2]; 14%[3])	68% (76%[2]; 26%[3])
With outdoor staff policy under development	(20%[2]; 7%[3])	(7%[2];17%[3])
With children's programs policy or procedures	75% (92%[4]; 41%[5])	72% (84%[4]; 56%[5])

1 *Of councils with outdoor pools.*
2 *Of councils with 'at least some' council employed outdoor staff.*
3 *Of councils with 'at least some' tender contract outdoor staff.*
4 *Of councils with 'at least some' council operated children's programs.*
5 *Of councils with 'at least some' contracted children's programs.*

Over the three-year survey interval, it appears there has been some shift in policy development by councils to attend to areas where policy was absent. By 2001 more councils had established policies in relation to shade provision and skin cancer control for parks and gardens, swimming pools and outdoor staff (both for employees and contract workers). In contrast the data suggest that while the vast majority of councils had policies for children's programs in 1998 there has been little activity in policy development in this area in the interim, with a fall in the prevalence of policy for children's programs.

It was encouraging to note the efforts to incorporate policy for contract workers' sun protection. Furthermore, the data suggest that councils are continuing to develop sun protection policy specifically for contract workers.

Discussion

This study describes the sun protection policies and practices currently in place in Victorian local government. The results are, however, somewhat limited by reliance on reports of council staff from a number of departments. Nonetheless, the data provide a first glimpse of how local government has incorporated sun protection initiatives into practice during a relatively stable period for local government following the significant restructure prior to the 1998 survey. Although the number of councils and their governing areas have been relatively stable, there is continued instability in planning with pressures to outsource more services and to take a broader and more collaborative approach to the delivery of health services.

The inclusion of sun protection in the key operational plans for shires and municipalities may be crucial for SunSmart in ensuring that skin cancer control initiatives are maintained in future. The majority of councils have now developed a Municipal Public Health Plan, but just under half have included a component on sun protection. In contrast little progress has been made with the development of Community Health Plans for Primary Care Partnerships and it is unclear whether these will be as widely utilised. A new focus for the SunSmart Community Program has been the development of strategies to incorporate shade development

initiatives into legislative and town planning codes. The current survey suggests there is much work to be done here with very few councils including shade as a criterion in planning permit approvals.

Policy on shade in parks and gardens was one area that apparently suffered most from the restructure of local government. It was encouraging to see the progress in this policy area being renewed in 2001. Nonetheless, there was no real evidence that councils' shade development in parks and gardens had declined during this period.

Policy development in relation to sun protection for contract workers was also encouraging in 2001, given the low levels of policy for this group in 1998. Nevertheless, few councils appear to have determined who would be responsible for actually providing sun-protective equipment for contract workers. In contrast, it appears employees were in general well catered for. Moreover, the scheduling of work to limit time outside during peak UV radiation periods and provision of portable shade structures for outdoor work was still not widely adopted.

In 1998 nearly all councils had a sun protection policy in place for *council operated* children's programs. Since then we have seen less focus on policy for *council operated* children's programs but with some improvement in policy development for *contract run* children's programs. Councils appear to rely on a policy for children's programs in general and it is less clear whether these are applied to all relevant programs. Most councils indicated these policies applied to childcare programs and they were less often applied to holiday programs, day care programs and kindergartens. If this is the case, a more unified approach needs to be taken to apply policy to all types of councils' programs for children.

Over the past three years councils appear to have implemented a number of strategies to promote support for patrons' sun protection at their outdoor swimming facilities. More councils have provided high levels of shade for all toddlers' wading pools (53% cf. 43%) and almost all councils (93%) had high levels of shade for at least some of these pools. Councils have also been active in developing sun protection policies for swimming pools, increasing from 19% to 37%. Despite heavy marketing of tanning beds, few councils have solariums at their recreational facilities. Nonetheless, more needs to be done, particularly in regions where swimming indoors is not an option. Councils in rural areas that were more likely to have only outdoor facilities might consider ensuring high levels of shade are available in areas around swimming pools and/or providing some shade over the main pool. It was also disappointing that over 40% of councils with kiosk facilities at their pools did not have sun-protective items available for sale.

In 2001 there was some evidence of a decline in councils including sun protection in their community programs. Similarly, few councils were participating in collaborative programs to encourage sun protection. The fall-off in health promotion activities incorporating sun protection may be due to competing priorities. A limited media buy for the 2001 SunSmart television campaign may have also kept skin cancer control lower on the local agenda. In addition, the SunSmart Community Program has been less active in promoting awareness-raising during recent years, with fewer brochures and handouts available for these activities. Instead the program has preferred to support more sustainable initiatives such as shade guides and policy development. Nevertheless, council health and community service providers have also indicated to the Community Program the importance of local disease incidence data in establishing the priorities for their communities. Currently, only melanoma incidence rates are available at a local level, while non-melanocytic skin cancers form the main burden of disease for communities (AIHW & AACR 2000). Provision of other demographic data and aetiological evidence along with state and national skin cancer rates may prove sufficient to ensure that efforts are maintained. In addition, community pressure and skin cancer compensation claims may also keep sun protection issues on the agenda in local government.

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