

## Smoke-free playgrounds – recommended motion for local councils

**Tobacco use is the single greatest cause of preventable disease. Reducing its use is a major and effective strategy for promoting public health.**

Concern over the harmful health effects of environmental tobacco smoke began to emerge in the 1970s, and in Australia, this concern culminated in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) report *Effects of Passive Smoking on Health*<sup>1</sup>. The report found that illnesses associated with passive smoking included:

- Lung cancer
- Respiratory disease in children
- Attacks of asthma.

A further NHMRC publication, *The Health Effects of Passive Smoking - A Scientific Information Paper*, released in 1997<sup>2</sup>, identified the following additional health effects:

- Coronary heart disease
- Asthma in children
- Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- Glue ear in children.

Community attitudes towards smoking have been changing over a period of time<sup>3</sup>. Due to the mounting evidence showing the harmful effects of passive smoking, and also because of litigation, by the mid-1990s smoke-free work-place policies had been introduced extensively throughout both public and private sectors. While all state and federal government offices had become smoke-free, bans and restrictions were also introduced in many shopping centres, hospitals, schools, child care settings and entertainment venues, as well as in the transport sector.

In Tasmania in April 2001, the Upper House passed the Public Health Amendment (Smoke-free Areas) Bill, which prohibited smoking in most enclosed workplaces, public places like shopping centres, and some outdoor areas such as reserved seating areas at cultural and sporting venues. And on 1 January 2006, new legislation came into effect which bans smoking in Tasmanian pubs and clubs.

Environmental tobacco smoke is particularly harmful to children, because:

- Their lungs and body weight are small, so the dangerous substances in smoke are more harmful
- Children are not always able to move away from other people's smoke, as adults are able to do
- Infants or children who breathe other people's smoke are more likely than unexposed children to:
  - Develop middle ear infections
  - Suffer more ear, nose, throat or chest infections, croup and wheezing
  - Become asthmatic with ongoing asthma attacks
  - Develop pneumonia and bronchitis<sup>4</sup>.

Children also model adult behaviour. Children of smokers are more likely to smoke than other children<sup>5</sup>. There is strong public support for better, and more wide-reaching, tobacco control activities<sup>6,7</sup>. Measures that discourage children and young people from smoking are particularly strongly supported.

Tobacco use is the single greatest cause of preventable disease. Reducing its use is therefore a major and effective strategy for promoting public health. As the entire community bears the social cost of smoking, it behoves all sections of the community to contribute to reducing its prevalence.

Council has a role in advocating better public health for its residents. Council has existing smoking bans in place – all Council buildings are smoke-free to protect both the health of Council staff and members of the public. Health organisations like The Cancer Council Tasmania are now urging stronger smoking bans in public places not yet covered by legislation.

While second hand smoke is generally not seen as a big concern in outdoor venues, it can still cause serious health problems for children, pregnant women and many other individuals who suffer from allergies or medical conditions like asthma and heart disease.

In 2003, the Launceston City Council adopted smoking exclusion zones around playground equipment and Council-controlled sporting venues. Many major sporting venues around Australia, including Stadium Australia, Telstra Dome, the MCG, the WACA and ANZ Stadium have become smoke-free in an effort to reduce community exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, and to make venues more family-friendly.

It is proposed that Council ban smoking around all children's playground areas and around playing grounds. While it is acknowledged that such measures are difficult to enforce, the erection of signage around these areas will act as a deterrent, and will also have an educative role throughout the community.

### **Recommended motion**

That Council:

1. Ban smoking within 10 metres of all children's playground equipment
2. Ban smoking around all playing fields and sporting grounds
3. Erect signage around playground equipment and playing fields to indicate that these designated areas are smoke-free
4. Ensure that events run or sponsored by Council should be smoke-free.

For more information on smoke-free parks, playgrounds and other outdoor public spaces, contact The Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

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1. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), *Effects of Passive Smoking on Health*. Report of the National Health and Medical Research Council Working Party on the Effects of Passive Smoking on Health. Adopted at the 101st Session of the NHMRC, June 1986. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987.
  2. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), *The Health Effects of Passive Smoking – A Scientific Information Paper*. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, November 1997. (<http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/advice/nhmrc/foreword.htm>)
  3. Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer. Quit Evaluation Studies (series). Victorian Smoking and Health Program. Melbourne 1985-2003. (<http://www.quit.org.au/index2.html> )

4. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), *The Health Effects of Passive Smoking – A Scientific Information Paper*. Op cit.
5. US Department of Health and Human Services. Youth & Tobacco. *Preventing Tobacco Use among Young People - A Report of the Surgeon General*. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Office on Smoking and Health. 1995.
6. AIHW 2002. 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: detailed findings. AIHW cat. No. PHE 41. Canberra: AIHW (Drug Statistics Series No. 11).
7. Walsh RA, Tzelepis F, Paul CL, McKenzie J. Environmental tobacco smoke in homes, motor vehicles and licensed premises: community attitudes and licensed premises. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 2002 ;26:536-42.