

5 April 2007

Mr.R.C. Francis, Mayor, QSO, MBE, JP
Masterton District Council
PO Box 444
Masterton

Dear Mr Francis,

I am writing on behalf of the Wairarapa Smoke Free Group to ask the Masterton District Council to consider developing a Smokefree Policy to keep recreational areas smokefree. The Smoke Free Group is a group of Health Promoters from the Wairarapa District that is the DHB, PHO, Heart Foundation, Wairarapa Cancer Society, Whairoa Whanui, Plunket, and Sport Wairarapa.

In May 2005 the South Taranaki District Council led the way in this area by developing a Smokefree Environments Policy which discouraged smoking in Council owned swimming pools and outdoor surrounds, playgroups and parks. Council events held in South Taranaki parks are now consistently promoted as smoke-free events, with promotional material for events in the park indicating that the venue is smoke-free. The South Taranaki District Council has not reported any difficulties enforcing the ban and sees its role as one of leadership and positive role modelling and will be implementing its policy through signage and education.

Upper Hutt City Council went Smokefree last year and South Wairarapa agreed last year to ban smoking at playgrounds but not sporting fields. This was a little disappointing but on the positive side the playgrounds are smoke free.

Smoking is the greatest single preventable cause of death in NZ, causing a quarter of all cancer deaths. Local Councils are in a unique position given their ability to communicate directly with communities and play a vital role in normalising smokefree and providing supportive environments for people to quit.

Local Councils have statutory powers under a number of acts that relate to public health. The Health Act 1956 states that it is the duty of every territorial authority, *'to improve, promote and protect public health within its district'*. One of the key purposes of Local Council is to *"promote the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of communities"* Policies designed to expand smoke-free areas are an example of a practical way that councils can contribute to this. The Local Government Act 2002 specifically states that councils can change policies for the purpose of *'protecting, promoting and maintaining public health and safety'*. In addition, Part 1: Section 20 of the Smoke-free Environments Act 1990 specifies that local authorities can provide *'greater protection from tobacco smoke than is provided'*.

A smokefree policy gives the Council an opportunity to promote a healthier community and a clean green image for its recreational areas. It shows the council is progressive and prepared to take positive action to help reduce the smoking rates of New Zealand's young people.

Where policies have been implemented locally and internationally there has generally been no need for enforcement. The focus has been on public education especially through appropriate signage and public education.

The Wairarapa Smoke Free Group are asking for the Masterton District Council to consider introducing a Smoke Free Policy to promote playgrounds, parks and sporting fields to be proudly smokefree.

Yours sincerely

Gaye Rowberry
Manager Wairarapa Cancer Centre
Cancer Society