

UPPER HUTT PARKS TO GO SMOKEFREE

Media Release, Tuesday 30 May 2006

Upper Hutt Mayor Wayne Guppy is challenging other local bodies in the Wellington region to follow his council's lead and go smokefree in parks. The Upper Hutt City Council is making all its parks, reserves, playgrounds and sports fields smokefree as of 31 May 2006, which is World Smokefree Day.

"This policy is all about the kids. When they see people around them smoke, they are more likely to believe that smoking is common or normal activity, and more likely to become smokers themselves.

"If Upper Hutt can do it, there's no reason why other councils in the Wellington region – and throughout New Zealand – can't follow suit. Helping to break the smoking cycle is one of the best things councils can do in the interests of the next generation."

Mr Guppy says that the council wants to create a safe and healthy city, and having smokefree parks is an important aspect of achieving that goal.

"We need to be responsible for the health of our community," he says. "We hear about hospital waiting lists all the time – well a lot of the people on those waiting lists have illnesses caused by smoking.

"If we can stop just a few of Upper Hutt's young people from becoming smokers, then we'll have been successful."

The Ministry of Health estimates about 4500 New Zealanders die from smoking-related illnesses each year.

Ben Kingi, president of the Rimutaka Rugby Club is right behind the smokefree parks policy.

"We've had a smokefree policy at our sporting events for some time now, and reaction has been really positive. Once people understand that it's not about punishing smokers, but about a positive outcome for the kids, they become completely supportive. We've had no problem with it at all," he says.

Upper Hutt City has worked closely with Regional Public Health (Hutt Valley District Health Board) to implement the policy. Support has also come from the Wellington Division of the Cancer Society and Valley PHO.

Signage will read: "This park contains fresh Upper Hutt air. Please do not smoke in our parks."

The South Taranaki District Council introduced a similar initiative in May last year, and Jan Martin, Group Manager of Community Services says that the community has taken the move in its stride.

"I'm in the parks a lot, and I haven't seen anyone smoking in them over the last year," she said.

Upper Hutt is the first metropolitan centre to introduce smokefree parks, and Mr Guppy is keen for other local bodies to follow suit by going clean, green and smokefree.

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Visuals of Mayor Guppy playing soccer in Trentham Memorial Park with Raymond Zorn, 17 and Abi Zorn, 14 are available from:

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