

Sun Protection Alert – a simple tool for a complex issue

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Abstract. This presentation discusses the development of the Sun Protection Alert, how it's currently being promoted and future plans for its promotion.

Discussion

The Sun Protection Alert (the Alert), the redesigned ultra violet index (UVI) tool was developed in association with NIWA, Metservice and in consultation with the Cancer Society of New Zealand. The Alert tells people the exact time of the day when they should use sun protection, in each part of New Zealand. It has been presented in weather forecasts since the end of 2011.

Development of the Sun Protection Alert

Excessive exposure to Ultra Violet Radiation (UVR) is the main cause of sunburn which in turn is the main exposure-related risk factor for skin cancer.

The Health Promotion Agency (HPA) through the SunSmart programme promotes sun safe behaviours with the aim of reducing skin cancer rates. The HPA has a responsibility to provide information about the risk of UVR to New Zealanders in a way that is relevant and timely, so that they can take necessary steps to protect themselves from the sun. It needs to be remind them as to why sun safety is important, educate them on how to be sun safe and motivate them to take necessary action to protect themselves from the sun.

The World Health Organisation provided several recommendations regarding the most effective ways to provide UV information. This included categorising different levels of Ultra Violet Index (UVI) based on colour and adding behavioural cues.

In New Zealand, from the summer of 2003/04, the UVI was publicised in the form of a graphic using colours and numbers (Fig 1). This tool replaced the burn time measure, which had been previously been used in weather forecasts. The UVI was communicated through several channels including internet, radio, and television (occasionally) and newspapers.

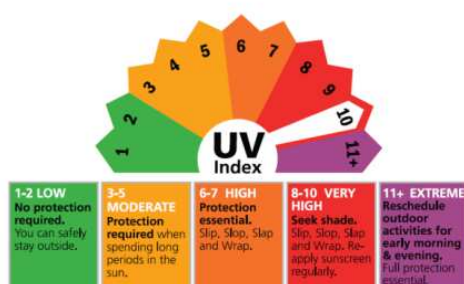


Figure 1: UVI Graphic

The UVI tool is currently used as part of the SunSmart Schools programme as an educational tool and is an effective means to convey scientific information about UVR to students.

The years following the launch of the UVI tool indicated some increasing awareness of the tool but that it was not necessarily resulting in any behavioural changes.

Research was commissioned in 2008, and then again in 2010 to understand the effectiveness of the UVI tool. Findings from focus groups showed that, along with general low awareness, the main issue with the UVI was around interpretation. While the UVI was understood at a basic level, respondents were frequently confused by the detail eg, meaning of the colours in the tool, relevance for own skin type, and the need to implement behavioural recommendations.

By the summer of 2008/09, some national news media (TV One, TV3 and several daily newspapers) stopped broadcasting the UVI. Media groups reported problems with fitting the UVI into the broadcast formats, and a perceived lack of interest and understanding due to the lack of change in the UVI over summer.

The research findings were used to guide the development of an alternative UVI tool in graphic form and this was tested, alongside a widget tool (text-based) developed by Cancer Council Victoria, in 2010/11. The testing showed a high preference for simple text messages rather than any graphic. It became clear that simple text messages were more effective, easily understood and conveyed the message about the times sun protection was needed more effectively over visual aspects.

The new design was also shown to media contacts. Overall, there was support from media contacts for the direction taken with the modified version of the UVI. The presentation of simple, relevant (regional) information, with greater emphasis on when protection was needed, was well supported.

Sun Protection Alert

In 2011 a revised tool called the Sun Protection Alert was developed and consumer tested. The majority of respondents rated the design positively and a third of respondents rated it very highly in terms of how well it encouraged them to protect themselves from the sun.

Based on these results, the Alert became the new UVI tool used in New Zealand. The new tool was launched end of 2011.

Key features of the Sun Protection Alert

The tool is called Sun Protection Alert. It tells people what to do when the sun is at its strongest. It prominently displays the beginning and end of risk period during a day.



Sun safety messages have been incorporated into the tool eg, seek shade, reapply sunscreen. These messages can be changed out daily and can also be tailored to suit particular days such as cloudy days.

Promotion

Since its launch, the Alert has been available as part of the weather forecast, through the MetService website (towns, rural, marine & surf), newspapers, television (TV3) and radio.

During 2011/12 and 2012/13 summer periods, the Alert was available from the beginning of daylight savings period and ended in early April, to coincide with the end of daylight savings.

However at the end of the Alert being broadcast in 2013, the HPA received feedback from public about the abrupt ending. Their queries were directed at the fact that UV levels tended to remain above three in several parts of the country during April, especially at midday. They also expressed confusion over why sun protection was no longer required from one day to the next.

Therefore, for the 2013/14 summer period, and with a view to further educating people about the nuances of the UVR risk profile, rather than abruptly stopping the Alert until spring time (when the UV levels rise up again), it was decided to incorporate a phasing out of the Alert, and keep it as part of the weather information till late April.

Another new feature introduced during 2013/14 period was the availability of the Alert on the MetService website over a five day period, rather than a two day forecast.

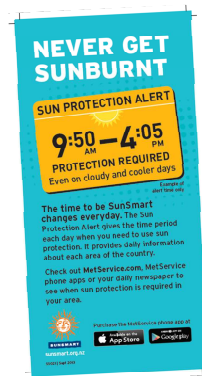
In 2013/14 a very important information channel was added to promote the Alert information to public – this was the inclusion of the Alert as part of the MetService mobile

app (available both on iPhone and Android). This development has represented a good opportunity to get the Alert information to a significant audience of around over 100,000 people who have the app downloaded on their mobile devices.

Sun Protection Alert mobile phone app (design only)



To support the promotion of the Alert, printed resources such as cards and posters have been developed and distributed. During the past two years, resources have been distributed to local councils, large employers, pharmacies, public health units and schools, both directly and through health promoters.



Another tool that has been hugely popular with pharmacies and some employers has been the Sun Protection Alert boards. These are physical boards that can be displayed in the reception area or front desk during summer months.

Other promotional opportunities have been also been tapped into. In the past two years the Alert has been promoted at large events such as the Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge, Summerfest, Parachute Music festival, Local Government NZ conference, NZ Recreational Association conferences, and at high school roadshows. The Alert boards and printed resources have been displayed at summer events conducted by councils in Auckland and Northland. The HPA has also worked to encourage employers, and others who have approached us such as high schools, pharmacies etc to display the Alert on their websites. Information on the Alert was also promoted through industry channels such as Site Safe.

Current awareness of the Alert

As part of the [Sun Exposure Survey 2013](#) we asked participants if they had seen the Alert and if they understood the alert. 50% reported seeing the Alert. 78.5% reported stated they had understood the Alert and had taken some action in response to the information.

Future plans

In the next year the following areas will remain a focus for promoting the Sun Protection Alert.

1. The HPA will continue to promote the Alert to local councils, as a tool for their outdoor workers (eg, parks and recreation teams) and at the events that they organise and manage. The HPA is working with several local councils as part of a Shade Assessment project and will use these opportunities to promote the Alert. We will also continue to work with organisations such as Local Government NZ and Society of Local Government Managers to tap into their channels, such as forums and newsletters, to promote the Alert.
2. The presence of a Senior Advisor Workplace/Sports within the HPA presents us with an opportunity to work alongside organisations with outdoor workers and sporting organisations to promote the Alert. We are also looking at channels such as travel sites, information centres and libraries as potential places for the Alert to be placed.
3. We will also be working with recreational organisations eg, NZ Recreation Association, Surfing NZ etc to promote the Alert through their networks.
4. The HPA will also be working to simplify the process for third party websites to access and place the Alert on their intranets / internets.
5. The HPA is also looking at developing winter messaging around being sun safe at ski fields.
6. There will also be ongoing engagement with media channels to educate them on the tool and ensure that they continue to promote the Alert.

For more information please contact

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