

Canadians using smart Aussie technology to prevent skin cancer

Monday 20 October 2008

The Canadian city of Toronto has identified shade as an essential component in the design of outdoor spaces and is committed to ensuring that children and other park users are provided with sun-safe, supportive environments. According to Health Canada, 80 per cent of damaging sun exposure occurs during childhood and the Canadian Dermatology Association warns that one in seven children will develop skin cancer because of over-exposure to UV radiation.

The City Council has formed a Shade Policy Committee to examine the shade available in its parks, gardens and recreational facilities with the aim of improving access to shaded recreational areas. The Committee, headed by Alex Shevchuk from the Parks, Forestry, and Recreation Planning Design and Development Department, will undertake a pilot project involving 'shade audits' of eight city parks, using innovative shade planning technology developed in Australia.

The Council has recognised that the shade audit process is a necessary step in identifying locations of high risk and prioritising them. Knowledge gained from the pilot will serve as a basis for conducting shade audits for all of Toronto's playgrounds, parks and aquatic recreation areas.

Data on each of the eight sites will be collected and assessed by a project team from Ryerson University, headed by Dr George Kapelos, Chair and Associate Professor Department of Architectural Science. The team will be trained in shade audit procedures and will use shade planning software developed by Sydney-based software developer, WebShade Pty Limited.

John Greenwood, Managing Director of WebShade, said:

"Canadians are strongly committed to protecting their citizens from the harmful effects of UV radiation, even though they receive only about half the Australian UV levels."

The WebShade software includes a unique 'risk profiling' feature which assesses the activities and existing shade patterns at a site and determines the need for additional shade. WebShade's ShadeAudit process produces a strategic shade report for each site, which can then be used to plan long-term landscaping and capital works projects.

A single blistering sunburn during childhood can double the risk of getting skin cancer. Over-exposure to UV radiation has other detrimental health effects - it has been linked to cataracts and can suppress the body's immune system.

The provision of suitable, well designed shade has other benefits, such as providing comfortable outdoor environments that encourage high levels of physical activity without increasing exposure to harmful UV radiation.

In planning the provision of new shade, the Committee favours tree planting rather than built shade structures. This 'green' approach to city planning has other benefits because trees act as a carbon sink and reduce toxic greenhouse gases, vegetation creates attractive open spaces and trees reduce heat buildup in urban areas.

For further information about the Toronto pilot project, WebShade Pty Limited or the WebShade ShadeAudit, contact John Greenwood on at j.greenwood@webshade.com.au or +612 9818 2177.