

# Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

## Local Authority Skin Cancer Prevention Survey 2004

### Overview

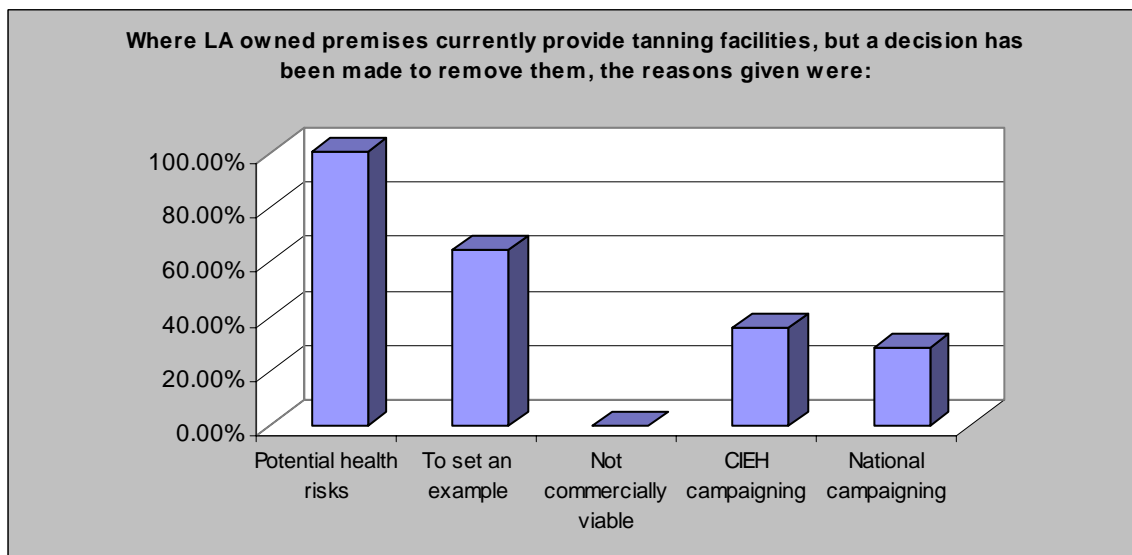
A questionnaire on skin cancer prevention strategies, with a particular focus on sun tanning facilities, was sent out to all local authorities (LAs) in the United Kingdom in January 2004. This was, in part, a review exercise to establish change since an earlier survey carried out some six years previously. 195 local authorities returned the completed survey, (compared to 119 for the previous study) a 45% response rate. Some 12% of respondents stated that they had a skin cancer prevention policy (compared to 8% in the previous survey) and a further 12% said that they intended to produce one. The remainder (76%) neither had a policy nor intended to create one.

Responsibility for skin cancer prevention rested at a variety of different levels, from local strategic partnerships or cabinet level members to departmental chief officer or individual officer. In most cases, responsibility was not specifically assigned.

59% of responding authorities had sun tanning facilities within premises that they owned. 35% were local authority run and 24% were contracted out. In the previous study 74% had tanning facilities but no details about operational management were requested.

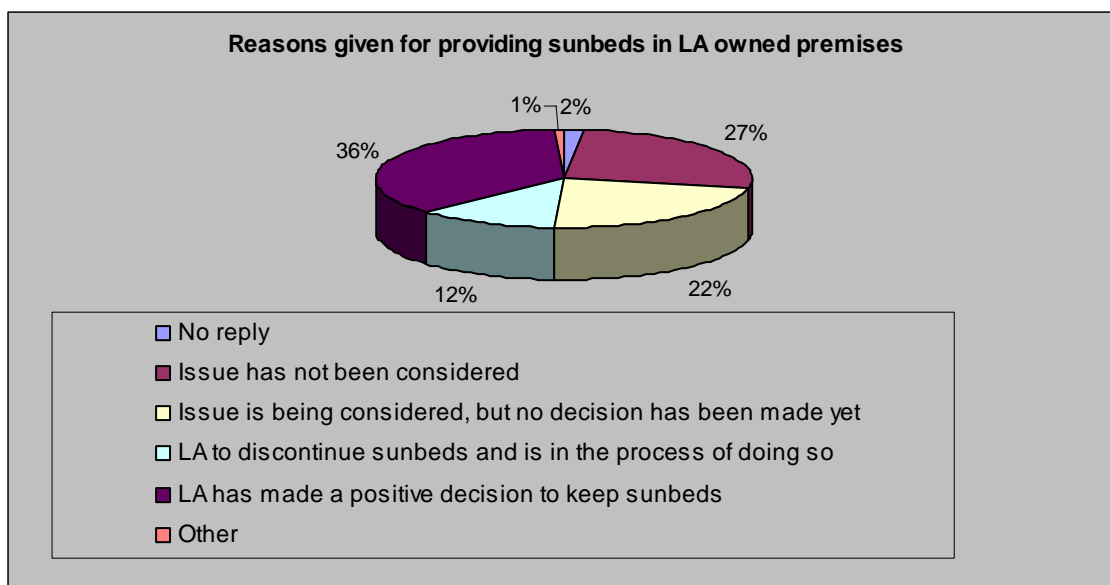
The survey showed that some 29% of respondents had removed sunbeds and the reasons for this were predominantly based upon potential health risks or the wish to set an example. These findings were similar to the previous survey. However, 12% of those that had discontinued use stated that a key factor in making the decision was lack of commercial viability.

Where sunbeds were in operation LAs were asked if they had considered removal. 22% said that they were currently considering the matter, 12% said that they were in the process of discontinuing use and 27% said that they had not considered a policy review. Whilst a number of factors had influenced recent changes in policy, 36% of those that had reviewed the situation said that they had been influenced by CIEH campaigning and 29% by national campaigning.



However some 36% had reviewed their policies and made a positive decision to keep sunbeds. The main reasons for retention were that:

- Sunbeds were a source of income generation
- They were popular with the public
- They were strictly controlled
- There was a lack of information to warrant banning



The average number of facilities owned by LAs was 3. Most of these facilities were staffed but some 8% were reported to be unstaffed.

When asked about numbers of privately owned premises that offered sun tanning facilities, many LAs were unable to give hard data. The main reason for this was that whilst they could identify sun tanning salons, premises that offered sun tanning as an additional facility, such as hairdressers, health clubs etc were classified under a range of different headings. However, the average estimated number of premises, was 17, with some 6% believed to be unstaffed.

Respondents were asked about the frequency of inspection for health and safety purposes in sun tanning facilities.

In LA premises:

- 11% were inspected every six months,
- 31% annually,
- 15% between one and three years,
- 37% quoted “other” frequencies.
- 6% did not reply

The “other” category showed considerable variation including:

- “On renewal of licence”
- “HSE inspection – frequency unknown”
- “Not inspected”
- “In line with risk assessment”

For the private sector, LAs varied in the frequency with which their health & safety inspectors visited e.g.

- 1% were inspected every six months
- 10% annually
- 36% between one and three years
- 46% reported “other” inspection frequencies.

Within the “other” category most replied that inspection was carried out in line with the HELA risk assessment requirements, which would normally be between one and three or one and five years.

LAs were asked whether or not they had received complaints and some 34% (66 LAs) replied that they had, giving details which could be categorised as:

- Burns (38)
- Hygiene issues (16)
- Maintenance/safety issues (16)
- Lack of advice/supervision (9)
- Under age usage (7)
- Excess heat (6)
- Skin rash/allergic reaction (3)
- Limitation of usage (1)

Finally, a blank text box was provided for “any other comments”. A few of these drew attention to local licensing regimes:

- Nottingham
- Dumfries
- Edinburgh

NB The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland has made a call for licensing throughout Scotland.

One local authority is looking at introducing local bye-laws and others have drawn up guidelines either based upon those issued by professional organisations such as the Institute of Sport & Recreational Management or as a result of discussions with the Sunbed Association.

Separately, other comments of note included:

- The need for the HSE to make sun tanning salons a higher inspection priority
- The need for a co-ordinated approach to sunbed use
- The need for a national policy with links to health risks
- A reference was also made to a recent article produced by the Local Government Association that claimed that sunbeds operated by LAs were more likely to be used responsibly than those in the private sector.

## **Summary**

The number of LAs with skin cancer prevention policies has increased only marginally since the previous survey (from 8% to 12%)

The number of LAs offering sun tanning facilities has decreased, from 74% to 59%.

Some 40% of sun tanning facilities in public sector premises are operated by contractors.

Key reasons for removal were concerns over potential health risks and the wish to set an example. Campaigning had influenced reviews of policy

Accurate knowledge of private sector premises was patchy but significantly greater numbers of facilities were offered by private business. On average there were 3 LA owned facilities to an estimated 17 private sector premises.

Inspection frequencies varied within both sectors. There was some indication that public sector facilities were being inspected for health and safety more frequently than the private sector.

Complaints had been received about sun tanning facilities. The most frequent type of complaint related to burns.

A small number of LAs had sought to tighten controls by introducing licensing systems

## **Areas to consider for future action**

Encourage LAs to draw up skin cancer prevention policies and promote skin cancer awareness

Encourage LAs to apply the principles of thematic inspection to sun tanning facilities as part of an overall skin cancer prevention policy

Encourage LAs to take a precautionary approach and withdraw sun tanning facilities from their premises

Encourage further research into the link between the use of sun tanning facilities and incidence of skin cancer

Encourage review of existing guidance on operation and use of sun tanning facilities to identify best practice

Encourage commercial operators to join a recognised trade association