

28th October 2011

Parking fine refunds for mailed tickets

By Joseph Aldridge

Hundreds of parking fines may have to be refunded after Whangarei District Council admitted a communication breakdown with its parking enforcement contractor.

Late last year the council informed its parking enforcement contractor, Environmental Northland Limited, to stop sending parking infringement tickets by mail when the offending driver was obviously still in the vehicle.

Parking wardens were told to hand the tickets to the driver, except in rare cases where the warden feared for their safety.

However, parking wardens continued sending tickets by mail rather than delivering them in person, in particular targeting parents dropping off their children at no stopping areas outside of schools.

The council yesterday said 151 such tickets had been issued this year, totalling about \$9000.

WDC regulatory services manager Grant Couchman said the tickets should not have been posted and the council would refund anyone who had received one and paid the \$60 fine.

"[The] council is in a position where we feel it is fair for anyone who has received an infringement notice through the post between December 9, 2010 and October 21, 2011 to ask for a refund. We will refund those who come to us," he said. "Please note that if a warden attempts to hand a person a ticket while they are illegally parked and the person drives off or becomes aggressive, I will permit the infringement notice to be posted."

Mr Couchman said the issue might be wider than just outside schools and he had asked parking contractor Environmental Northland how many other tickets were mailed instead of being hand delivered.

School principals say illegal stopping creates a safety issue and they support the council's efforts to enforce the parking bylaw — however, enforcement should be done in a fair and transparent way.

Tikipunga Primary School principal Donna Donnelly said student safety was the school's foremost consideration, so she supported the enforcement of parking rules outside the school.

However, instead of warning drivers to move on, parking wardens had been writing tickets out of sight of the offending drivers, she said.

Ms Donnelly said she had felt some of the tickets received by parents this year had been "a bit unreasonable" but she had not

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complained about it because the drivers had been stopping illegally.

Marg Williamson, the wife of Whangarei district councillor John Williamson, was sent one of the tickets after parking outside Tikipunga Primary in April.

Councillor Williamson managed to get his wife's ticket cancelled after he approached council managers to query the method of ticketing. Councillor Williamson later paid the ticket after the *Northern Advocate* asked him if it was appropriate for a councillor to approach managers for advice on a parking ticket.

The details of how Councillor Williamson managed to get his wife's ticket cancelled remained unclear until council-watcher Warren Slater received a response to his Official Information Request.

In the response, WDC support services group manager Alan Adcock said Councillor Williamson's wife's ticket was cancelled because it had been mailed rather than given to her directly at the time of the offence.

The council last year told its parking infringement contractor to cease the practice because it created the impression that the council was more concerned with revenue gathering than with parking management.

Councillor Williamson said yesterday he felt his original point had been validated but he would not be asking for a refund.



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