

# TE WAHA NUI

FREE

"The Big Mouth" — an AUT journalism publication

No 14, 1 September 2006



## New beginning

Is the Maori Queen's passing the start of a new future for Maori?

p7



## Downtown cops

Our city streets are not for the faint hearted.

p12



## Noah Hickey

Football, touring and the All White life

p24

# Walking to our graves



PHOTO: VICKI KING

- Nearly 300 Aucklanders die from air pollution every year.
- Auckland air may be twice as deadly as London's.
- Poisonous gas levels often fail WHO standards.

by Vicki King and Jess van der Schaaf

A regular lunchtime stroll down Queen St could be deadly.

Nearly 300 Aucklanders are dying prematurely from air pollution every year. The main culprit is traffic fumes.

Inner city dwellers are worst hit, with deadly pollution levels in areas of dense traffic like the CBD's urban canyons.

And Aucklanders should be worried. "You're more likely to die from the effects of pollution than you are in a road accident," says air quality scientist Guy Coulson, of the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research.

Vehicle emissions cause most of Auckland's pollution, resulting in serious health problems, especially for asthmatics and heart or lung disease sufferers.

Auckland's carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide levels frequently fail World Health Organisation safety standards.

"A back-of-the-envelope calculation would show there's the possibility you're twice as likely to die from the effects of pollution in Auckland as you are in London," says Coulson.

To encourage reduced vehicle emissions in New Zealand the Ministry of Transport (MOT) launched its Choke the Smoke campaign last month.

Kevin Mahon, principal air advisor for the Auckland Regional Council (ARC), says raising awareness is important. But it needs to be backed by legislation.

"Advertising is really only a precursor to the regulations being introduced. The big hole at the moment is that transport is still relatively unregulated."

David Crawford of the MOT says educating people is essential to address the problem.

"Once you raise people's awareness, they may be more receptive to the changes introduced," he says.

The Government has proposals to revise fuel specifications in line with

European standards. Ticketing of smoky vehicles and tougher emission standards for imported vehicles are also planned.

But none of these initiatives are yet legislation, despite the Government issu-

**"You're more likely to die from the effects of pollution than you are in a road accident."**

ing the ARC a mandate to reduce Auckland vehicle emissions by 53 per cent by 2013.

While the ARC is responsible for achieving the reduction, the necessary legislation is under Government jurisdiction, says Mahon.

"The only way we can deliver is if they do their part and we do ours. They shouldn't be scared of regulating."

While the Government will introduce

visible smoke checks to vehicle warrant of fitness tests this year, executive director of the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation of New Zealand, Jane Patterson, questions the new tests.

"Our position is that this isn't sufficient. We want a testing regime which is more scientific and akin to that being used in Britain."

Coulson says pollution is a tricky problem to master in this country.

New Zealand's cars often "struggle on" for about 30 years, unlike Europe where they are scrapped after 10, she says.

And that's bad news for Auckland's inner-city dwellers.

Sunil Kushor, of the Auckland Regional Public Health Service, says people should think seriously about where they are walking, especially if they are asthmatic.

"We generally recommend people exercise, but they shouldn't walk along the main arterial routes during peak hour traffic."