

 [Print this article](#) |  [Close this window](#)

Solariums flout law after melanoma death

Caroline Marcus

January 17, 2010 - 12:00AM

Almost all Sydney solariums are flouting laws introduced by the State Government after melanoma victim Clare Oliver's death, new figures show.

Government research obtained by *The Sun-Herald* found 98 per cent of solarium operators had failed to comply with tough new legislation set down in May. Of 89 businesses audited since September by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, only two complied with the new restrictions.

Amendments to the Radiation Control Act include prohibiting solarium use by children under 18 and people with very fair skin, displaying proper warnings about risks associated with ultraviolet radiation exposure, limiting the amount and frequency of exposure, providing protective eyewear and adequately supervising clients.

The new figures show there has been a 30 per cent reduction in solariums since the regulations were introduced.

Rogue operators will not face penalties of up to \$11,000 for breaching the act, instead being given notice to change their business practices. An additional 50 NSW solariums outside Sydney would also undergo audits in the first half of the year.

Frank Sartor, the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer), said the level of compliance was "appalling".

"The solarium industry should now consider itself on notice: either adhere to safety standards or find another business," Mr Sartor said.

"I have instructed follow-up audits to be conducted and I have ordered that solarium operators who are still flouting regulations be penalised to the full extent of the law."

The medical oncologist for Clare Oliver, Grant McArthur, called the findings "very alarming".

"It clearly highlights how dangerous solarium use is for the public because, clearly, the guidelines that have been put in place are just not being followed. I would encourage the NSW Government to move forcefully," Dr McArthur said.

Dr McArthur said that the drop in solarium use was positive news, indicating that the public was getting the message that sunbeds were dangerous.

The World Health Organisation last year placed sunbeds in the highest cancer-risk category alongside smoking and asbestos.

It followed a 2007 Queensland Institute for Medical Research Study, which found that people younger than 35 who visited a solarium increased their risk of developing melanoma by 98 per cent.

Cancer Council NSW policy and advocacy manager Anita Tang urged the Government to take a tougher stance towards any businesses that still failed to meet requirements. The drop in solariums mirrors that of Victoria, where 45 per cent of tanning salons had closed since the state introduced its own tougher legislation.

Solarium operator George Lihounas said it was "fair enough" that rogue salons were being cracked down on but the Government was running a scare campaign.

"A lot of these bad operators bring us all down," said Mr Lihounas, owner of the Sun Lounge franchise in NSW and Victoria.

"A lot of people who are under-age and a lot of people who used to use solariums but stopped are now spending their time in the sun. They are doing one to eight hours a day in the sun, as opposed to 10 minutes in a solarium.

"I think that self-serve needs to close down. I think that gyms need to be monitored a bit better ... the Health Department has spent millions on this. They came out and bamboozled us.

"It is just a big fear campaign. If you look at Victoria, we've got the lowest melanoma rate with the highest solarium use."

Fitness First, whose 34 solariums all failed to comply with the legislation, failed to return calls from the *The Sun-Herald*.

A mother's plea: don't let others die like Clare

The mother of melanoma victim Clare Oliver has urged Australia's leaders to get tough on solariums in the wake of poor compliance rates with new legislation.

Priscilla Oliver lost her 26-year-old daughter on September 13, 2007 following a short battle with skin cancer that was attributed to solarium use. She said state and federal governments should get tough on rogue sunbed operators.

"I lost my daughter to melanoma; no parent should go through this and I don't want other young people to suffer as Clare did," she told *The Sun-Herald*.

"I would like to see all governments around Australia tighten rules around solarium use."

Before her death, Ms Oliver embarked on a public campaign from her Melbourne hospital bed. She had discovered a lump under her arm three years earlier that was diagnosed as melanoma.

She made the connection between the cancer and her solarium use, having been told by operators that using a solarium every second day was the best way to get a tan and tempted by the offer of cheaper deals buying packages with multiple sessions.

Her mother wrote a letter to the NSW Government last January, before legislation was introduced. "We need strict laws to make sure there are no more packages and that people don't use solariums too often," she wrote.

"I want to make sure that any businesses that do the wrong thing are not allowed to keep going.

"I hope you will honour the memory of Clare. I hope you make sure that what happened to Clare won't happen to others. I hope that you will pass strong laws to protect people from solariums."

'There are other things I don't do like smoking, things other people die from'

Claudine Gibson, a 28-year-old retail manager from Strathfield, began using solariums 11 years ago to get an even tan for modelling jobs and gymnastics events.

She has not been put off by the public campaign on the dangers of solariums, preferring to use them to get bronzed than sunbake or apply "orange and fake-looking" self-tan.

"I would never burn in a solarium and used to get more burned in the sun on holidays," she said.

"Sometimes I'm more tanned in winter than I am in summer."

Ms Gibson (pictured) said that in the past year she had noticed solarium operators had been more responsible.

"I know that they're a lot more careful with customers," she said.

"I can't go in two days in a row. I know friends who have been knocked back, girls with pale skin or freckles, and they're disappointed but that's fair enough."

Once she has her base colour after a few visits, she returns to her solarium in the city once a week or fortnight to top it up - using a bed for 10 minutes at a time - buying discounted 10-session passes for \$110 and accelerator cream for \$100.

Ms Gibson said she was not concerned with the increased risk of developing melanoma, saying her Italian olive skin put her outside the highest risk category.

"To be honest, there are other things I don't do like smoking, things that a lot of other people do and die from," she said.

"The risk is just as high doing anything else.

"There are a few rare cases - I have heard of people dying from melanoma - but from the many people I know who use [solariums], nothing has ever happened.

"The die-hard solarium fans haven't been put off but I know some people [who] get a bit scared off."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/wellbeing/solariums-flout-law-after-melanoma-death-20100116-mdf5.html>