

GPs develop plan to get invalids off benefit

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Medical certificates could be replaced by 'fit notes' in push to get sickness beneficiaries back to work

A consortium of North Shore doctors has a radical proposal to use health professionals to help sickness and invalid beneficiaries back to work.

The Harbour Health primary health organisation, representing 38 general practices, has proposed a pilot programme to the Ministry of Social Development that could eventually extend to all the 145,000 people on sickness and disability benefits.

It comes ahead of a welfare working group report due to go to Government on Tuesday with what are expected to be similar recommendations.

The group's first two reports last year fingered doctors as key "gatekeepers" who often make people think they can't work because they have been given a medical certificate saying so.

It is expected to recommend a shift, modelled on changes in Britain, from "sick notes" to "fit notes", which encourage doctors to advise their patients on work that could help their recovery.

Harbour Health's proposal has sprung out of its experience with a pilot ACC programme called Better@Work, which pays doctors an extra \$50 to spend 15 minutes longer with accident victims, discussing their work and reporting on what they can do despite their injuries.

The doctors' reports go to a team of three occupational therapists and an occupational health nurse in Harbour Health who are paid by ACC

How it works

The plan: Pay doctors to find out whether sickness and invalid beneficiaries can at least partly go back to work.

The costs: An extra \$50 for doctors to spend 15 minutes longer with accident victims under the current ACC scheme.

The savings: Weekly compensation payments reduced to one in 15 cases (national average is one in 11 cases)

to bring injured workers and their employers together to plan a gradual return to work.

Harbour Health clinical services general manager Janice van Mil said the scheme reduced the number of ACC claims that led to weekly compensation payments from a national average of one in every 11 cases to just one in 15 since it began a year ago.

Their proposal is based on "a health psychology intervention" that could be triggered by either someone requesting a medical certificate to apply for a benefit or a referral of an existing beneficiary from Work and Income.

"A programme with welfare would fit very strongly with the approach of health psychologists, that is around motivation and self-worth," she said.

An Auckland health psychologist who works with heart and lung transplant patients, Iris Fontanilla, said health psychologists worked with patients with a wide range of physical conditions with psychological side effects.

"These return-to-work programmes make sense if people do feel better physically as a result," she said.

A10 Injured workers kept on the radar



The shrink wrapping of the Athena at Westhaven began at 5am yesterday and was finished by mid-afternoon. Picture / Dean Purcell

It's a wrap — luxury superyacht ready for refit

by Christopher Adams
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One of the world's biggest and most luxurious private sailing yachts, the Athena, was "shrink wrapped" in Westhaven marina yesterday.

The 90m vessel, owned by American billionaire and Netscape founder Jim Clark, is undergoing a refit at

Orams Marine Services in Auckland. The shrink-wrap technology, provided by Auckland firm Shrinkforce, weatherproofs the yacht so work can be done on the water, removing the need to put it in a shed on land.

Athena is the biggest boat to be refitted in New Zealand, Orams managing director Craig Park told the Herald on Sunday last month.

The three-masted schooner comes with a formal dining room, media lounge, custom-built kitchen and five cabins. It is worth between \$70 million and \$100 million.

Athena, which takes 10 guests and 19 crew, can be chartered for US\$345,000 (\$460,000) a week, according to a yacht chartering website. Abbey Whaley of Shrinkforce said

it had been a challenging job, especially setting up the on-water scaffolding.

"It's pretty tricky making sure the boat is balanced."

The wrapping of the boat began at 5am yesterday and was completed by mid-afternoon.

Shrinkforce does about 75 per cent of its business in the construc-

tion industry, with the rest in the marine and events sectors.

The highly durable material starts out being about as thick as five sheets of paper, but when heat is applied as it is wrapped around an object, the material shrinks to around 30 per cent of its original surface area.

Ms Whaley said they would wrap five more superyachts this summer.

Napolitano cancels NZ visit after shooting of US border agent

by Audrey Young
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United States Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has cancelled her visit next week to New Zealand to attend the US-NZ Council Partnership Forum in Christchurch because of the fatal shooting of one of

her agents in Mexico this week. It is possible she could reschedule for later this month but her absence will be a blow to organisers.

Council of Trade Unions president Helen Kelly will boycott the forum, saying she has concerns over the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement which will be discussed. She pointed to the "insensitivity" of accepting

Warner Bros as one of the participants in the forum.

The union leader clashed with the film producers during the dispute last year over production of *The Hobbit*.

Janet Napolitano, as a high-ranking member of President Barack Obama's Cabinet, would have lent considerable weight to the fourth US-NZ Partnership Forum.

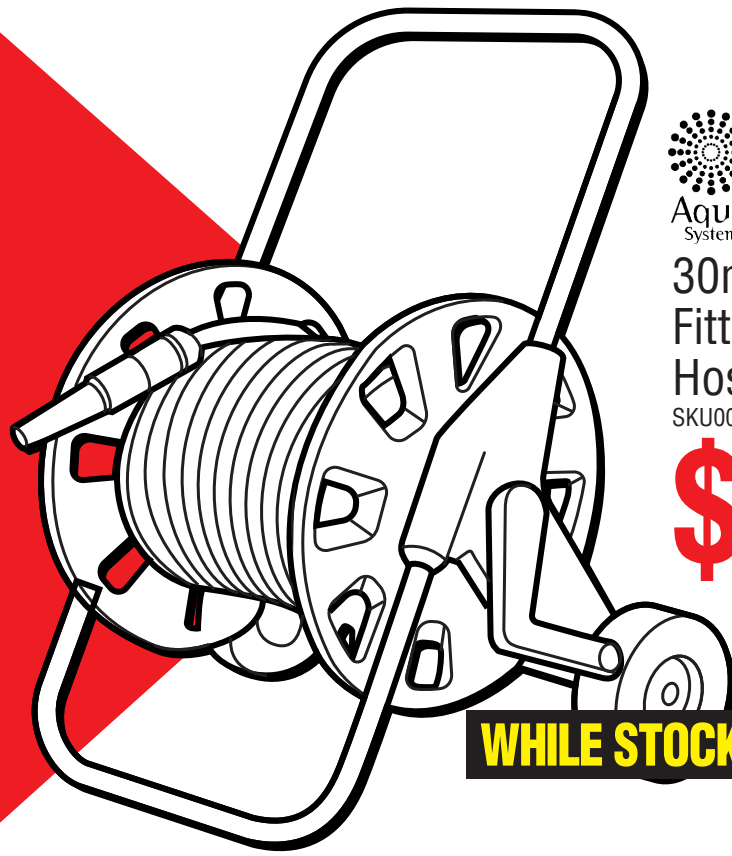
But two immigration and customs enforcement officers were shot and one killed this week, and border enforcement issues with Mexico are intensely sensitive in the United States.

She may attend the funeral of the slain agent. Prime Minister John Key similarly pulled out of a trade delegation to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates last

April to attend the funerals of three air force staff killed in an Anzac Day helicopter accident.

The forum in Christchurch will go ahead and others still coming are Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, former Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, eight congressmen, and Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security Mariko Silver.

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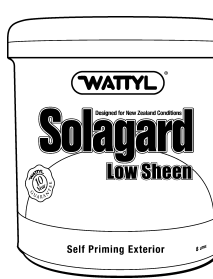
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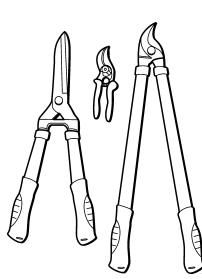
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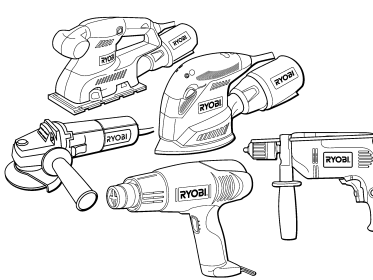
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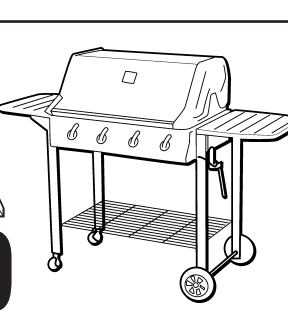


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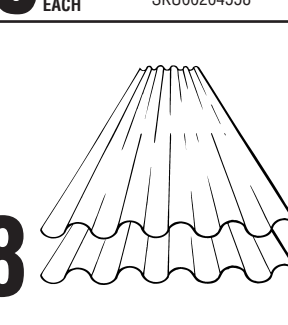
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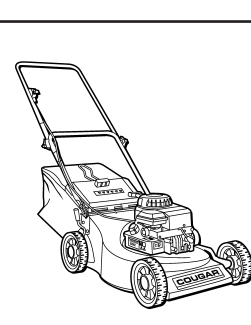
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FREE D.I.Y. WORKSHOPS
SATURDAY 19TH FEBRUARY
11am How to mix and lay concrete
1pm How to build a planter box
SUNDAY 20TH FEBRUARY
11am How to re-pot plants and protect your garden from insects
1pm How to lay ceramic floor and wall tiles

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