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\$10,000 prize up for grabs in the 9th annual Plain English Awards

The annual Plain English Awards are on a mission once again to banish jargon and reward the clear and precise. The Awards are a serious business, with the top prize, worth \$10,000, going to the organisation that can prove clarity and straightforwardness are part of its DNA.

Any New Zealand business can enter. The Awards categories honour documents and websites — and the people who write them.

And members of the public can join in the push for plain English by nominating good or bad documents in the People's Choice category.

'The Awards encourage organisations to show they care about communicating honestly and clearly', says Gregory Fortuin, Chair of the WriteMark Plain English Awards Trust. 'Making the effort to communicate in plain English can make a difference to the lives of many people.'

Since their launch in 2006, the Plain English Awards have honoured several hundred organisations across both the public and private sectors. And the wins signal very real benefits to New Zealanders. Last year's grand winner, the Ministry of Social Development, reduced the number of calls from welfare clients needing to clarify a point from an average 25% to just 2.5%. These gains came from a determination to make communications about changes to the welfare system as clear and understandable as possible.

Winners in the Awards are rightly proud. Rob Forlong, Chief Executive of the Environmental Protection Authority, spoke after winning the Best Plain English Document for the Hazardous Substances Toolbox. 'One business owner went so far as to write to our Minister praising the toolbox ... During my career in government, getting fan mail for a government publication is somewhat of a rarity.'

And the dreaded People's Choice 'Brainstrain' award for the worst document or website, has had remarkable success in turning around some of New Zealand's worst communicators. The Commerce Commission and StudyLink are just two of the organisations that took the dubious 'win' on the chin. Both organisations reworked the offending material to be clear and understandable.

Entries to this year's Plain English Awards close on 12 September. To enter, visit www.plainenglishawards.org.nz.

Ends

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