

What is Green Burial?
by
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A “green burial” is a simple and natural means of burial that is an alternative to the current “contemporary” funeral. Green burial or natural burial is the process by which the body of the deceased person is interred in the ground in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition and allows the body to return back to the earth naturally and without the use of toxic chemicals or products.

The body is prepared for burial without the use of embalming fluids, such as formaldehyde, and often wrapped in a biodegradable burial shroud and may be either placed directly in the ground or within a biodegradable casket without the use of a cement or metal and liner and preferably buried in a “green cemetery.”

Green burial embraces interring the deceased in either cloth shrouds (preferably made from organic material), or in caskets made from sustainable materials such as wicker, seaweed, wool, or pine without the use of varnish, metals, or other toxic chemicals.

Currently, the American way of burial is one of the most resource intensive industries requiring the use of our precious hard woods for caskets, mining for the use in the making of metal caskets, cement vaults and toxic chemicals for embalming.

Each year 22,500 cemeteries across the United States bury approximately:

- 827,060 US gallons of embalming fluid – most often formaldehyde
- 90,272 tons of steel caskets
- 2,700 tons of copper and bronze caskets
- 1,636,000 tons of reinforced concrete vaults
- 14,000 tons of steel vaults

(Compiled from statistics by Casket and Funeral Association of America, Cremation Association of North America, Doric Inc., Pre-Posthumous Society)

This equates to approximately enough formaldehyde and other toxic chemicals to fill 8 Olympic-size swimming pools every year, enough metal to rebuild the Golden Gate Bridge once every year, and enough concrete to build a two-lane highway across the United States of America every year.

More and more people are using cremation as a way to address environmental concerns, unfortunately cremation also negatively impacts our environment and consumes large amounts of resources. Here are some largely overlooked facts: Noxious emissions produced by cremation include:

- carbon dioxide
- hydrogen chloride
- carbon monoxide
- formaldehyde
- dioxins
- furans and
- mercury.

The cremation process consumes fossil fuels and contributes to more than 23 million pounds of CO₂ and approximately 10% of all mercury omitted into the air and atmosphere which comes from dental fillings during the cremation process

Contrary to popular belief, embalming is not required in any state within the United States and the Federal Trade Commission requires funeral service providers to inform consumers that embalming is not required, unfortunately this information is often omitted and not provided to family and friends when they are seeking burial options for a loved ones burial.

Natural burial practices date back thousands of years, but was interrupted during the Civil War when families wished for their loved ones body to be able to be transported back to their home. It wasn't many years ago that our grandparents and their parents tended to the body of their loved ones. The women washed and dressed the body, which was then laid within a casket built by local craftsmen or family member and kept in the home for loved ones to say their goodbyes. These customs have been lost and are now largely left to the funeral industry. Currently, a growing population of people are seeking to tend to the body of their loved ones themselves and has resulted from more and more people tending to their dying loved ones within their homes.

The following are some common questions asked by those seeking a more natural or green burial:

Can my body be tended to at home before burial or cremation?

Yes, as long as there was not a sudden, unexpected death. If a death occurs at home, the County Medical Examiners office and local law enforcement **must** be notified to investigate the circumstances of the death (unless the death occurs under Hospice care at home), even if the person has died of natural causes. This is to insure that no foul play or trauma is involved, and that a physician or County Medical Examiner will be available to complete a Tennessee death certificate.

Does a doctor have to “pronounce” someone dead?

No. There is no law in Tennessee stating that a doctor must “pronounce,” or attend the death of someone. Tennessee allows this pronouncement to be made by anyone recognizing that a death has occurred. The body of the deceased does not have to go to an emergency room to be pronounced dead. Reminder: If a sudden death occurs and Hospice or an attending physician was not working with the person, you must contact the legal authorities.

Am I required by Tennessee law to use a funeral home?

No. There is no law in the State of Tennessee saying that a funeral home must be involved in handling the body of a deceased family member. Tennessee Code

Annotated (T.C.A.) 62-5-102 states:

“Nothing in this chapter shall be constituted to prevent or interfere with the ceremonies, customs, religious rites or religion of any people, denomination or sect, to prevent or interfere with any religious denomination, sect or any body composed of persons of a denomination or to prevent or interfere with any church or synagogue from having its committee or committees prepare human bodies for burial or to the families, friends or neighbors of deceased persons who prepare and bury their dead without charge.”

Is a transit permit required in the state of Tennessee?

No. Transit permits are not necessary if moving a body within the State. If the body is transported across state lines, whether by a funeral home or privately by a family, a transit permit may be required by the receiving state.

What are the requirements for the Death Certificate?

A Death Certificate must be filed with the office of vital records within 5 days after death or prior to final disposition. The Death Certificate must be signed by a Physician or D.O. The funeral director, or person acting as such, who first assumes custody of the dead body shall file the death certificate. *Title 68-3-502A* A Death Certificate may be obtained from the Vital Records Division of the Health Department – not from a Physicians office or the Medical Examiners office. The Death Certificate must be properly filled out and filed in the office of vital records before the body is interred.

Can I bury my family member on my private property?

Yes. Tennessee does not have a law preventing anyone from burying their family member on their own private property. The Zoning Office in the city or county in which the family plans to bury the body should be consulted to determine if there are any restrictions or zoning ordinances.

Other common concerns are regarding the logistics of keeping the body cooled which is easily obtained by simply placing dry ice on and around the body or by lowering the temperature of the room in which the deceased is lying. The body can be kept cooled without problems for up to three or more days.

Caring for our loved ones body for burial can become a means of saying our last goodbyes in a more natural manner. Understanding the laws of Tennessee and becoming aware of your options allows those who wish to lovingly say their goodbyes to their deceased loved ones in a more natural manner the opportunity to bury their loved one utilizing “green burial.”

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