

Information About Green Funerals

Annually, it is estimated that the funeral services industry uses 2.8 million bottles of embalming preservative fluids, which end up in landfills when emptied. Other types of environmental concerns that are a result of the current practices in the funeral industry include:

- Body fluid disposal
- Preparation room solid waste
- Crematory air emissions
- Use of formaldehyde
- Emissions from transportation
- Manufacturing of caskets
- Waste from floral tributes

As we all endeavour to make greener choices in our everyday lives, we also need to act responsibly and sustainably when it comes to the myriad of choices in planning or arranging a funeral.

As it is our tradition to care for others, funeral professionals must also care for their communities and be cognizant of how their services may affect not only public health and safety, but also how their professional practices affect the environment and offering green solutions and choices in the interest of the health & well being of future generations.

What is a Green Funeral?

Many of us think of a ‘green’ funeral as a burial in a woodland cemetery, using a shroud or a biodegradable casket. But, there are many aspects that can be considered when planning a funeral to be environmentally friendly as possible. This download is intended to encourage a broader view of the term ‘Green Funeral’ and briefly look at some of the issues that can be considered in taking an environmentally aware approach to funeral arrangements.

Green Burial Grounds

Woodland Cemeteries are generally set amongst mature trees and are home to a broad variety of wildlife and woodland plants, reinforcing the concept of the renewal of life. Currently, there are no woodland cemeteries in Canada. It can often be forgotten that many urban and rural cemeteries may incorporate areas where green burials can take place and where maintenance is reduced to allow its natural habitat to develop further.

Green Cemeteries are cemeteries that either provide solely green burial grounds, or have designated a portion of the cemetery grounds for green burial space. Generally, a set of criteria must be met in order to have a burial in a green cemetery, such as:

No embalming, biodegradable casket or shroud, no grave liner, no grave marker, etc.

To date, there are only a couple of green burial sites in Canada. The first-ever green burial space is located at the Royal Oak Burial Park on Vancouver Island, in British Columbia, offering about one-eighth of an acre for green burials. In Ontario, [The Union Cemetery](#) in Cobourg is the only cemetery that currently offers a green burial space.

Going Green

Every aspect of the funeral arrangements can make a difference to how environmentally friendly a funeral is, including the timing, location, floral tributes, the way a cemetery or crematorium is managed – even the choice of memorial can affect its environmental impact.

Embalming

Embalming is the art and science of temporarily preserving human remains to forestall decomposition. It is a process that replaces blood with chemical preservative fluids – both of which are introduced to the public sewer during the embalming process, increasing the resources needed for water treatment. Embalming also produces waste from plastic chemical bottles, bio-hazardous waste, not to mention the energy required for operating embalming equipment. Embalming is not a legal requirement in Ontario. It may, however be a requirement by airline providers if the deceased is to be transported out-of-province or out-of-country. Depending on the nature of the death, with adequate refrigeration and humidity control, the decomposition process is slowed and often family can view the remains without the use of embalming.

Timing

Usually, the deceased is kept refrigerated before the funeral, so the longer the interval between death and the funeral, the more energy will be used to maintain the refrigerated environment.

Casket

A wide range of caskets and containers are available, from the large ‘American Caskets’ which can be made from rainforest timbre or metal, to locally-made caskets using renewable, local resources. Apart from the environmental credentials of the materials used to make the casket, the distance those materials and the casket itself have travelled might also influence the type of casket or container you choose. Eco-friendly choices are: locally made caskets from locally-sourced and renewable materials, wood-and-dowel

construction as opposed to those that use metal hardware, unfinished wood as opposed to high-gloss or other toxic finishes, as well as using such alternatives as biodegradable cardboard containers, eco-pods, or cotton shrouds.

Floral Tributes

The concept of ‘food miles’ is becoming increasingly well publicized, and the same principle can be applied to cut flowers. Oftentimes, floral tributes also incorporate plastic/metal frames, foam, cellophane wrapping, synthetic tapes, ribbons, and other decorative items. Composting and recycling can help to reduce the environmental impact of floral tributes, and floristry foam can be crumbled and mixed with compost to help retain moisture in hanging baskets or planters. Gaining popularity for families of the deceased is to request memorial donations in lieu of flowers. This way, flowers are eliminated altogether while redirecting money to a cause that was important to the deceased. If you choose to use flowers, there are shops that supply organic and locally grown varieties.

Burial or Cremation

Many different factors affect the environmental impact of burial and cremation. While burial is generally accepted as ‘green’ with regard to emissions and energy use, ground conditions, mechanical excavation and the maintenance of the cemetery (lawn-mowers & pesticides) must also be taken into account when assessing environmental impact.

Road Miles

The distance from home to the funeral itself and then subsequent visits to a grave or memorial location also affects the environmental impact; burial in a natural site many miles from home could actually be more detrimental to the environment than a burial in a local cemetery.

Memorial Marker

The choice of memorial can also have implications for the environment. Many memorials are made from imported stone from India or China; more environmentally friendly memorials might be made from local stone, recycled stone, or wood.

This document provides some basic information to allow you to consider some of the issues that can be taken into account when making funeral arrangements.

For further information, please contact us:



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