
Chapter 3: Current Trends in the Funeral Industry

3 CE Hours

By: Staff Writer

Learning objectives

- ♦ Identify and describe three significant changes in the funeral industry during the last decade.
- ♦ Explain the difference between preplanning and preneed contracts.
- ♦ Discuss the pros and cons of prepaid preneed contracts.
- ♦ Define the primary goals of green burials and requirements for certification.
- ♦ Describe alternatives for a viewing without embalming.
- ♦ Identify and explain four components of a home funeral and backyard burial.
- ♦ List three ways to make a funeral service less resource-intensive.
- ♦ Explain why most flowers purchased for funeral services are not “green.”
- ♦ List five differences between traditional and natural cemeteries.
- ♦ Choose and explain two new guidelines from OSHA and NFDA for the safe use of formaldehyde.
- ♦ Define resomation, and describe the process.
- ♦ List three ways cremations can be made more “green.”
- ♦ Identify four ways to use social media networking to market a business.
- ♦ Describe the most common services and/or merchandise associated with pet funerals.

Introduction

Current trends in the funeral industry require competitive funeral businesses to develop new skills as the industry becomes a mix of old and new traditions. These new skills and traditions include: The use of technology; environmental safety; personalized presentations; natural and/or “green” practices; home funerals; and pet cremation and burials. These trends are changing the funeral industry across the United States.

The U.S. death rate will peak in the 2020s as older “Baby Boomers” reach their mid-70s; however, the number of burials will continue to drop, the number of cremations will continue to increase, and consequently, a broader range of services and products will need to be available to a wider consumer base. According to Josh Slocum, executive director of the nonprofit Funeral Consumers Alliance, by

2017 the projected rate of cremation will reach 49% (Slocum, 2014). The National Funeral Directors Association projects the discrepancy between cremation and burial rates will grow even larger and that in 2020, cremation will represent 56%, while burial will represent 38% of decisions (NFDA, 2015). By 2030, cremation is projected to represent 71% of decisions while burial will decline to only 23%.

This indicates that competition will increase as funeral homes will be joined by a variety of vendors and industry specialists offering expanded services and products including comprehensive concierge support. Funeral professionals must stay informed on current trends, embrace new technology, and expand their roles to address the industry and consumers’ preferences and demands.

Changing attitudes toward funerals

Widely held beliefs regarding death, funerals and burials worldwide are changing. A deceased’s body is not considered a hazardous threat to public safety, unless diagnosed with a serious communicable disease. Materials used in preserving the body are increasingly the cause of environmental safety concerns. Industry professionals are aware that embalming fluid can be hazardous for personnel who work with it, and for the public. Concerns regarding the environmental risks associated with embalming chemicals lead the European Union to consider a ban. In the U.S., the Funeral Consumers Alliance has expressed dismay that funeral home effluent is not regulated, and that waste is often flushed into a sewer system or a septic tank.

There are between 76 to 79 million “Baby Boomers,” i.e. persons born between 1946 and 1964, as of 2016. The majority will make end of life and/or funeral decisions that are better informed, more inquisitive, better funded, and less deferential to authority figures than their parents. Traditional open-casket funerals may not be the norm in these decisions as customers are increasingly comfortable considering other options.

In addition to the rise of cremation, consumer attitudes about funerals have changed significantly, shifting from traditional funerals toward options that are more environmentally friendly, cost effective, personalized, and/or natural. There are no current statistics on the number of U.S. citizens that are considering home funerals, but the number is increasing according to Lee Webster, president of the National Home Funeral Alliance (Webster, 2016). In all states, it is legal to have a home funeral, and most states do not require a licensed funeral director for final arrangements. The states that do mandate funeral director involvement, from signing the death certificate to overseeing burial or cremation, include Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, and Utah (Irving, 2016).

The Green Burial Council, an advocacy group for natural and green burial, notes a growing membership and has nearly 600 members, up from 350 in 2014 (Webster, 2015). “People are looking for more affordable, earth-friendly, and meaningful,” Webster said. “It all boils down to authenticity: They want their end-of-life processes and rituals to reflect their life in a way that we have not really seen before.”

Changing responsibilities

Funeral professionals will likely see their responsibilities grow and this will require additional training and staff. The most successful companies will become “jack-of-all-trades” which will include the

ability to use social networking and/or software apps to the company’s advantage. Comprehensive services will encompass food services for catered events; travel and accommodations; off-site venues;

services for pets; eco-friendly funeral options; grief counseling; and technology. Marketing will require services to be listed on the business website, and the business to be available via social

media, and software applications, i.e. “apps” for smartphones and tablets. Community presentations will continue, but they will need to incorporate state of the art multimedia presentations to be competitive.

Changing ownership

Funeral homes were often family-run, and passed down through generations, usually from father to son. Funeral service professionals are no longer predominately male. Today many mortuary school graduates chose the profession independent of any family connections and often began the business as a second career after working as medical personnel, chemists, cosmetologists, nurses, or artists.

According to NFDA 2016 statistics (NFDA, 2016b):

Fifty-seven percent of mortuary science students in the U.S. are women. Many of these women have discovered and are attracted to the skills and traits needed as a funeral director, including communication skills, compassion, a desire to comfort those coping with a death as well as organizational and event-planning skills. Today, families or individuals privately own 86% of funeral

homes in the U.S. with the remaining 14% owned by publicly traded corporations.

In the 1990s, large corporations purchased many smaller funeral homes, anticipating financial benefits as the aging “Baby Boomer” population began to pass away. This turned out to be a poor business decision as increasing numbers of individuals choosing cremation over burials upset the financial model, yielding much lower profits than expected. These large companies were unresponsive and inflexible to the increased demands for cremation, leading to lost revenue and the eventual sale or closing of many businesses unable to adapt.

The opposite is true currently with the growing trend of customer service dedicated to personalization, individualization, and creativity to meet the changing demands of the consumer.

Increasing competition

Funeral homes were traditionally secretive regarding their services, products, and prices, but this is no longer viable. With increased access to information via the Internet, and the ease of comparison, as well as more vendors and service providers, transparency is key, and competition is fierce. Vendors, e.g. Costco or Walmart, now provide products that were exclusively the domain of the funeral industry, and provide them at lower cost. Funeral professionals will need to provide additional value with their services and products to compete. Concierge funeral services accessed online or by phone, offer support for comprehensive funeral planning and services throughout the U.S. and Canada. These companies do not provide the services, but receive a commission from funeral industry providers. Concierge services include the following:

- Constant support for planning services.
- A national database of funeral products and services to meet personalized services demands.
- A confidential and secure database to store information.
- Price comparisons delivered in a consumer friendly format.
- Planning and selection of funeral services and product options tailored to the consumer.

- Communication, including assistance with price negotiation, by concierge staff directly with funeral providers, allowing families to avoid the traditional sales focus.
- Assistance in the selection of caskets and funeral products.
- Travel arrangements including flights, car rentals, and hotels.
- Event planning such as venues, restaurant(s), florist(s), design or catering services.
- Assistance with insurance claims.
- Pet funeral services including cremation, and burial with owners.

The Internet, social media, and software apps allow consumers access to extensive information regarding funeral practices and options twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Consumers can research religious traditions and incorporate these traditions into their funerals. They can learn about federal regulations and industry requirements that may require professional assistance in planning “green” events. They can even buy a casket at a chain store or from an independent carpenter. The new, mainstream funeral industry is likely to continue. When some states attempted to ban consumers from buying caskets from certain vendors, these regulations were not passed.

Funeral home function and design

Changes in funeral home function have produced a range of adaptations to traditional funeral home design in the last decade. Innovations are driven by technological improvements in mechanical systems, energy-efficient building materials, and green practices as well as new safety requirements for ventilation and chemical handling and disposal. Other innovations are associated with: the evolving nature of the funeral industry; the increased demand for cremation, including resomation; the reduced demand for traditional burials; and more flexible building designs that can accommodate a variety of community functions.

Cremation calls for drastically redesigned facilities including a crematorium, a dedicated cremation chapel with viewing access, a room to comfortably view a video about cremation services, and/or a location to attractively display urns, keepsakes, and other options for the interment of ashes. Pet cremations, which are becoming increasingly common, require a different setting, and in some states, must be conducted in a completely separate area from where human remains are processed.

Burial grounds are also changing. More people are asking to be buried with their pets, requiring revised regulations in some areas. Natural burials have strict rules regarding practices and materials as well as the

land maintenance. As of 2013, there were 37 natural grounds certified in the U.S. Following this “green” trend, groundskeepers are turning to less resource-intensive maintenance practices.

Funeral homes are branching out by hosting a variety of functions beyond wakes, such as family reunions or community meetings. Community or social functions require a reception room that can accommodate a large group, availability in the evenings, and adequate parking, all of which are common to most funeral homes. Kitchen space and equipment, with access for catering staff, or banquet space and servers may be required. As funeral homes become more integrated into community life, assisted by new marketing strategies like social media networking, they can be a place to do more than grieve, as the recent trend in creative funerals suggests: they can be a place to celebrate life and need not be associated only with death.

The appearance and ambiance of funeral homes is also changing. Where traditional funeral homes may have felt intimidating and somber, and were decorated formally in dark wood, they are now friendly and inviting, elegant and comfortable, and decorated with attractive colors. Foyers and reception areas are warm, with comfortable furniture. There is a desire for bright, airy spaces that are not only welcoming, but provide a suitable environment for any

type of social gathering as well as a spiritual services. Colors are very important because they can influence mood, but visitation rooms typically have very simple decorations and muted wall colors to highlight floral arrangements.

Important emerging trends include:

- Growth in “green,” natural, and home funerals and/or cremation as well as pet funeral services.

Preneed sales

Consumer organizations concerned with funerals, such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA), encourage preplanning, noting that the process of making these arrangements can benefit customers and their families (AARP, 2015; FCA, 2015). Some people see death as the ultimate loss of control, and that preplanning for death allows an individual to confront these issues. Additionally, families that preplan tend to learn more about the preferences of the family member who is the customer, and are better prepared to carry out his or her end of life plans. Preplanning and prepaying are not the same, and the AARP and the FCA do not recommend prepayment, in general.

There are some pros and cons of to consider. Preplanning combined with prepaying through a preneed contract can offer the customer more control and peace of mind than simply preplanning. Ideally, the customer learns about all of his or her options for goods and services and can inspect the merchandise and facilities. Prepaying may lift a burden from loved ones by ensuring that a professional is lined up to handle what needs to be done right after a death, such as transporting and storing the body, and obtaining needed certificates.

In contrast, when a person does not preplan or prepay, his or her family must make important and costly decisions quickly and while they may be affected by of intense emotions including shock, grief, confusion or anger. Knowing what funeral home or services to use, if any, can be beneficial. Grieving loved ones may be unfamiliar with the process or the role of the funeral director, and may feel uncomfortable asking questions. They may be vulnerable to pressure from unscrupulous funeral homes to buy more expensive good or services, e.g. spending money “to show how much you care.” Loved ones may struggle with not knowing how someone wanted to be commemorated. These decisions can create or exacerbate family conflicts.

There are no guarantees with preneed contracts and a number of issues may arise. The AARP has compiled an analysis of state law that governs preneed contracts to educate the consumer (Erskin, 2015):

- No federal regulation specifically addresses preneed contracts, and state-level regulation is inconsistent.
- Every state except Alabama regulates preneed contracts, but state laws vary greatly in scope, approach, and requirements.
- Twenty-four states regulate both funeral and burial contracts in a single statute, 17 states have two, separate preneed funeral and burial laws, and the remaining eight states have a single statute that cover only preneed funeral contracts.
- In many states, only licensed funeral home directors, cemeterians, or their employees or agents are allowed to sell preneed contracts. In other states, third-party sellers, i.e. persons who are neither funeral directors nor cemeterians, can sell preneed products as long as they obtain a license or permit from the state.
- Laws governing funding options and issues, e.g., trust funds, insurance policies, contract provisions, itemization of goods and services, portability restrictions, handling of escrowed funds, refund and redress mechanisms, i.e., a state consumer protection fund, the Unfair and Deceptive Acts and Practices (UDAP) law, and private right of action vary from state to state.
- There is generally a significant length of time between the signing of the preneed agreement and the need for the goods and services described in the agreement and mishandled funds may be undetected for years.

- Increasing demand for personalization and creative services.
- Expanded preplanning services including requests for specific restorative arts and individualized, themed body presentations.
- Increased reliance on comprehensive concierge services.
- Continued reduction in number of traditional burials and funerals.
- Legal changes associated with the industry, and with consumer safety and protection.

- It is often difficult to determine if specific provisions of the contract were fulfilled, e.g. the type of casket, since the person who signed the contract is likely deceased. Survivors rarely have knowledge of specific provisions, and they may unknowingly be charged for products and services included in the initial agreement, for services not requested by the deceased, or for more expensive goods or services.
- Preneed agreements are becoming increasingly complex with more decisions and more potential for fraudulent activity. Preneed agreements likely include a package of both funeral and burial goods and services from funeral directors and/or cemeterians that may overlap or result in duplicate payments.
- More third-party sellers are offering preneed agreements. Adequate oversight of these agreements is often hampered by state regulators’ lack of authority and resources and a lack of understanding by the consumer of their rights and procedures for redress.

The Funeral Consumer Alliance (FCA) cautions consumers against prepayment through preneed contracts (Funeral Consumer Alliance 2015). They offer the following information to consumers:

Insurance companies and funeral homes often tout the benefits of the pre-paid plans they sell. They urge customers to pay for their funeral in advance, in order to spare their survivors the trouble and expense, lock in current prices, or shelter their assets from Medicaid. The truth is that it is usually unwise to pay ahead. No matter how attractive the business makes it sound, there are serious drawbacks to pre-paying that the seller may not disclose. The children and survivors of those who have prepaid often misunderstand the contracts, are unaware of them, or find themselves surprised by additional fees. In addition, many states have inadequate laws protecting funds in preneed plans, and money invested could be at risk. Unless Medicaid requires you to “spend down” your money to qualify for benefits, you’re better off planning ahead without paying ahead.

The FCA identifies the following risks of prepaying:

- If the purchaser decides to cancel, move, or change the plan, consumers may not receive a full refund.
- In many states, the seller may yearly withdraw part or all of the interest earned on the account.
- The cash-out value on an insurance policy is can be less than originally paid.
- The money paid for funeral arrangements is not available for emergencies if needed.
- Many insurance companies will not pay full benefits, or anything at all, during the first few years premiums are being paid.
- Money spent may not cover future funeral costs, which could result in the use of cheaper merchandise or requests for additional money.
- Survivors may not be aware that funeral costs have been paid, and may pay at a different funeral home.
- If the person dies out of town, and the family employs another funeral home, it may be difficult to get a refund.
- By the time of death, the funeral home may have a poor reputation or be out of business.
- Laws in many states do not offer much protection for prepaid funeral money. Only New York and New Jersey have somewhat

consumer-friendly preneed laws. New York requires one hundred percent of the money be deposited in trust.

- The consumer has the right to a full refund, with interest, on a revocable plan, and irrevocable plans are transferable although many individuals and families do not understand their rights.
- The money may not be secured in a federally insured bank and may be under the control of the seller.
- Funeral insurance plans are not tightly regulated and the plan may not provide a full refund with little or no penalty if cancelled.
- If the trust or insurance policy is transferable to another funeral establishment, the new funeral home is not obligated to honor the prices of the original funeral home.

The FCA promotes alternatives such as preplanning arrangements without prepaying or establishing a Pay-On-Death account (POD) to set money aside for funeral expenses without handing it over to a funeral firm. POD accounts deposit funds in a bank to cover current funeral costs, and interest accrues to cover any increases due to inflation. The account can be made payable upon death to a trusted family member or friend who will use the money properly for the funeral and funds are released immediately after death without the delay of probate. POD bank accounts are FDIC-insured, remain in

Relationship to Medicaid

Medicaid applicants must typically have only \$2,000 available to them although this may vary among states. Seniors applying for Medicaid may need to “spend down” their assets to qualify. Only prepaid, irrevocable preneed funeral contracts are allowed to be used for this purpose so Medicaid planners, nursing home advisors, and social service and healthcare advisors often encourage senior citizens to use preneed contracts as a spend-down device. In this case, the customer would prepay a lump sum to transfer all assets, but would not be able to access the money.

According to the Medicaid fact sheet, burial funds are set aside and clearly designated for an individual’s or spouse’s burial, cremation, or other burial-related expenses (CMS, 2015). If managed correctly, these funds will not be counted as assets when qualifying for Medicaid. Funds must be kept separate, e.g. an account at a financial institution that is designated and labeled for this purpose. The limit on the amount of these burial fund accounts is \$1,500. These accounts are revocable so they can be accessed if needed. It should be noted that proceeds from a life insurance funded burial contract would be counted toward this limit on burial funds. Because states’ preneed regulations are

the purchaser’s name, and the money can be withdrawn at any time. Medicaid counts these accounts as assets, and the interest is subject to income tax (FCA, 2015).

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Funeral Rule addresses preneed contracts as well. The following is a brief summary from their website (FTC, 2015):

Under the Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC) Funeral Rule, consumers have the right to get a general price list from a funeral provider when they ask about funeral arrangements. They also have the right to choose the funeral goods and services they want, and funeral providers must state this on the general price list (GPL). If state or local law requires purchase of any particular item, the funeral provider must disclose it on the price list, with a reference to the specific law. The funeral provider may not refuse, or charge a fee, to handle a casket bought elsewhere, and a provider offering cremations must make alternative containers available. The FTC conducts undercover inspections every year to make sure that funeral homes are complying with the agency’s Funeral Rule. The Funeral Rule applies anytime a consumer seeks information from a funeral provider, whether the consumer is asking about preneed or at need arrangements.

not uniform, they may or may not address specific issues of concern to the consumer. It is important to know state regulations regarding funerals, embalming, preneed contracts, and Medicaid since each state has its own limit as to how much a person can put into a preneed account for Medicaid spend-down purposes. There are often state rules specifying that money left after a funeral paid for by a preneed account must be returned to the state, not kept by the funeral home or given to beneficiaries. Penalties for businesses found in violation usually require violators to take training, undergo additional testing and pay fines.

States use different agencies to regulate state policy. While states such as New York and Connecticut have strong laws covering many aspects of the preneed process, other states have weak laws. There is no reliable guide to current laws so consumers have to research each state’s statutes individually. This fact underscores the need for an attorney or financial planner to review a preneed contract, and for a funeral director to thoroughly know state rules as well as how to research the rules of another state, e.g. if a customer dies there.

NATURAL OR “GREEN” FUNERALS

According to the NFDA, “green” funerals incorporate environmentally friendly options in order to meet the needs of a family requesting a “green” service. A “green” funeral may include any or all of the following: A small gathering in a natural setting; use of recycled paper products only; locally-grown organic flowers; carpooling; organic food; no embalming or embalming with formaldehyde-free products; the use of sustainable and/or biodegradable clothing, shrouds, or

caskets; naturally occurring burial markers; and certified natural or “green” burial grounds (NFDA, 2016 a).

Another trend is a natural burial, which do not include any embalming. All parts of the funeral, including the clothing and casket must be made of materials that are non-toxic and biodegradable. Grave markers must also be naturally occurring and environmentally conscious so rocks, trees, or flowers may be used as markers rather than the traditional granite or quartz.

Burials

More cemeteries and funeral homes, especially those in the U.S. Pacific Northwest, are providing natural burials, and the demand is likely to continue to grow. The movement away from traditional funerals and burials is partly because they are resource-intensive. Traditional burials and funerals require many materials and those materials use an extensive amount of energy. In turn, this translates into a much more expensive funeral. The increased demand for “green” practices suggests that consumers are happy to reduce their costs and reduce their environmental impact. Some of the resources

used for traditional funerals and burials are as follows (Green Springs Natural Funeral Preserve, 2015):

- **Chemicals:** More than 830,000 gallons of embalming fluid, along with ethanol and other chemicals, are used to prepare and preserve bodies buried in the ground.
- **Wood:** More than 39 million feet of hardwood lumber are used to build caskets each year.
- **Steel:** More than 90,272 tons of steel are used to make more than 800,000 steel caskets each year.

- **Concrete:** Cement and metal burial vaults, designed to keep the ground from settling as the casket and body decay, require 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete each year.
- **Stone:** Thousands of headstones are made from granite and marble, which are quarried using fossil fuels and fuel-intensive processes.
- **Water:** Traditional cemeteries landscape with gas-powered mowers, synthetic fertilizers, and/or water irrigation systems.

Another strong incentive for green burials is the scarcity of land. Farmland and natural areas are under pressure: the amount of U.S. farmland has declined by an estimated one million acres annually due to development. The amount of land purchased for residential and commercial development is increasing at almost three times the rate of population growth (Lynch, 2016).

A traditional cemetery buries approximately 1,000 bodies per acre, requiring two square miles for new grave spaces each year. In contrast, a green cemetery normally holds 50 to 100 bodies per acre (GBC, 2007). This low density allows natural cemeteries to restrict burials from ecologically sensitive areas. Drainage spots, streams, dense wooded areas, and restoration areas can be left undisturbed. Land that might be unusable for traditional cemeteries is more likely to be suitable as a location for a natural cemetery.

New legal form: Formaldehyde-free embalming authorization

In keeping with the trend of moving the funeral industry toward environmentally safe embalming for “green” funerals, in 2012 the NFDA developed a form that authorizes formaldehyde-free embalming. According to the NFDA, this new form not only serves as an embalming authorization form, but also includes a clause indicating that the family wants the funeral home to use a formaldehyde-free embalming solution and understands that the results may differ from those of a solution containing formaldehyde. Members can download this and all sample legal forms and documents from the NFDA website (<http://www.nfda.org/legalforms>) at any time, and at no cost (NFDA, 2012 b).

Use of alternatives to embalming

Those who desire to view a body but are opposed to embalming because they want a green burial can be accommodated in a number of ways. While many assume that laws require embalming, embalming is primarily required to preserve the body for viewing. Refrigeration or dry ice can be an appropriate alternative, especially for the first seventy-two hours after death. Funeral homes with refrigeration units can easily refrigerate the body and have a short public or private viewing. Most families require only a few days for the funeral process before cremation or burial, and most human bodies do not deteriorate quickly. If refrigeration is not available, ice or dry ice can be used to preserve the body until burial. When dry ice evaporates, it releases carbon dioxide, so proper ventilation is necessary.

Because family members may be unaware, funeral providers should inform individuals involved on the fact that refrigeration does not restore a lifelike appearance. If the family or funeral professional feels the body needs some type of preparation, it must be discussed and explained thoroughly to the family representative in keeping with the wishes of the deceased. Cosmetic restoration or intrusive process may not be desired. Funeral professionals should not make decisions regarding features or other standard restorative measures prior to discussion with the family member.

Ecobalming

The mission of ecobalming is to develop environmentally safe embalming practices that preserve the body as a part of the “green” burial process. The objective is to have:

- No toxins in the embalming or burial process.
- No secret or undisclosed ingredients.
- Full disclosure of all chemicals and processes.
- Documented environmental impact of all chemical components.

- Little to no impact on the environment.
- Full disclosure and provided material safety data sheets (MSDS, 2015).
- Only biodegradable items used in all aspects of the embalming and/or burial process.

The process of ecobalming, as a complement to a “green” burial, exemplifies newer views regarding death, funerals, and the celebration of the person. Ecobalming rejects traditional methods used in the funeral industry for hundreds of years. The goal is to provide funerals and burials that are more natural, affordable, practical, and personal, and to provide a more meaningful celebration at the end of life.

Natural funerals

Natural funeral services may include the following:

- The loved one is cared for, washed, anointed and dressed in a natural way, maintaining the natural appearance of the loved one and allowing the family to experience the changes that naturally occur after death.
- They may occur at home, in a funeral home or other location.
- The use of essential oils to control bacterial activity and herbs to scent the body.
- Cooling with the use of dried ice, ice packs and air-conditioning.
- Support by a funeral director if the family prefers assistance. Many funeral homes offer assistance for a home funeral and burial.
- Burial in a biodegradable casket or covered in a shroud and placed directly in ground.
- No commercially treated, cut or artificial flowers are used.
- Grave markers would be naturally occurring in the environment. A plant, tree, shrub or rock indigenous to the environment would be used.

Funeral directors willing to assist in natural funerals may contact the Green Burial Council to be listed as a provider at: <http://www.greenburialcouncil.org>.

Home funerals and burials

A home funeral is a family or community-centered celebration of an individual’s life after his or her death. The care, visitation, memorial service, and burial are handled in the home environment. The emphasis is generally on minimal, noninvasive, and environmentally friendly care of the deceased in a manner that mirrors his or her lifestyle. Home funerals allow families and communities to become involved in the process of caring for the deceased including: washing, anointing, and dressing the body; preparing for the visitation or service; and arranging for final disposition, all in keeping with the religious or cultural practices of the individual. The control and participation in the care and preparation of the body is believed to help the family and/or community move through grief and acceptance of death in a positive, meaningful way that promotes emotional healing. The home is where life memories and family history are made so many believe it natural that the end of life stage occurs there as well. Home funerals historically were a time when families came together to share memories and celebrate the life of the individual in an authentic and familiar setting.

A growing number of U.S. citizens are returning to a hands-on, no-frills experience of death. They follow the body care and preparation steps for natural funerals. Unvarnished wooden or biodegradable boxes replace ornate caskets; viewings are in living rooms; and in some cases, burials occur on personal property, e.g. backyards. There is no count of home funerals but home funeral organizations have won battles in recent years in states like Minnesota and Utah that attempted to ban the practice. Most states have nearly eliminated any requirements that professionals play a role in funerals. It is now legal in all but seven states (Connecticut, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, and Utah) to care for a family member after death.

The growth of community-based, nonprofit home funeral groups, and the establishment of burial grounds that support home burial indicate an increasing demand. A number of books provide guidelines for families in all phases of home burial. By bringing the body home, embalming is avoided; family members may even build casket. When ready for burial, family members can transport the body to a cemetery or call a funeral home to assist. A funeral home can help ensure that the person transporting the deceased has the proper permit and follows approved procedures regarding cooling, and length of time before burial that may be required in their state. Funeral homes willing to accommodate home funerals can help put family members at ease regarding necessary documentation or in making decisions. Flexible funeral homes can provide the level of assistance needed.

The number of backyard burials has increased dramatically in the past decade as have the number of businesses that assist with these services. The FCA reported only two companies that aided families holding home funerals in 2002, but now there are over 50 companies. According to <http://www.lawyers.com> (2013):

Burial on private land is allowed in most counties in the U.S., as long as certain requirements are met. The site must meet “distance from municipality” requirements and have a minimum number of acres. A family burial plot or cemetery must be registered with the county government. A “declaration of use” should be accompanied with a lot map, showing the exact location of the burial place.

Trends in “green” funeral resources

Green funerals attempt to minimize resource consumption, practices associated with forest destruction, and unhealthy effects on the planet and workers, for example, mainstream high-volume flower production. To address these problems, products can be certified as fair trade or environmentally neutral. Forest certification was launched in the 21st century to help protect forests from destructive logging practices. Like the “organic” sticker on produce, forest certification was intended as a seal of approval, and a means of notifying consumers that a wood or paper product comes from forests managed in accordance with strict environmental and social standards.

Because flowers must enter the U.S. pest-free, farmers often saturate flowers with pesticides and other chemicals, many of which are banned or restricted in the U.S. Unfortunately, flower imports are not inspected for pesticide residues because they are not food products. As a result, these chemicals enter the soil, blow across landscapes, and enter the air via evaporation. Once chemicals leak into groundwater and soil, they can enter ecological food chains. They can also adversely affect pollinators, including bees.

Organic or local flower growers reduce the carbon and chemical footprint of flowers, but tend to cost more than non-certified bouquets because the cost of growing is higher. Premiums are often added for community development projects in flower farming communities. While organic flowers are not necessarily fair trade, and vice versa, these two green attributes help protect the health and livelihood of flower farmers. Buying organic, regards purchasing a product that has not been treated with pesticides or other chemicals which eliminates a major threat to the health of farmers and workers. Fair trade ensures that farmers are adequately compensated for their product and guarantees humane labor conditions, which often include chemical-free growing conditions. More people are choosing organic and/or Fair Trade flowers or flower alternatives, although only 20% of flowers sold in the U.S. are certified as eco-friendly and/or socially responsible (Flower Review, 2014).

Natural funerals may also try to cut down on transportation resources by reducing the number of cars in a funeral procession or by using hybrid vehicles. Funerals with graveside services might rent passenger vans or arrange families to carpool to reduce carbon emissions. There are even green limousines or car services for funeral cortèges, which

This paperwork takes time and it should be completed well in advance of any anticipated death and burial.

The National Home Funeral Alliance provides the following tips to guide families in making a decision on a home funeral option (National Home Funeral Alliance 2015):

- Consider the condition of the body, the wishes of the deceased, and the level of comfort of those who will be caring for the body at home.
- A home funeral guide for preplanning is important. It is also possible to consult a funeral home that assists with home funerals.
- Know the state regulations regarding transportation, timelines, and burial on private land. Some states require a funeral director to assist with certificates and permits, such as a certified death certificate.
- Learn the principles of body care. Home funerals are typically handled by family members, but professional desairologists, i.e. funeral cosmetologists, are trained to prepare a body and can be hired to help. The National Home Funeral Alliance and other home funeral organizations recommend preparing the body according to certain guidelines: bodies need to be washed and kept cool to slow decomposition; if the time before burial is less than 24 hours, cold air conditioning may be enough; but for longer periods, cooling gels packs can be placed under the body.
- Consult books available to guide the home funeral process.

can avoid some carbon emissions. Green cars, limousines and shuttle services can be hybrids, or use biodiesel or compressed natural gas (CNG). Having the memorial-related locations contained to a small area also cuts down on transportation costs and the use of resources. Often, good planning will allow a “green” funeral to maximize efficiency and minimize waste.

Product sales associated with “green” funerals

“Green” funerals and burials typically require a number of products whose sales are growing along with the “green” demand. This trend is likely to continue, with merchandising becoming an increasingly important part of overall sales. This section reviews the necessary product composition to be defined as “green” according to the Green Burial Council (GBC, 2013). All GBC approved caskets, urns, and shrouds must be constructed from plant-derived, recycled plant-derived, natural, animal, or unfired earthen materials, including the shell, liner(s), and adornments.

Caskets, urns, shrouds, and alternative containers

- Basic construction materials for shells, liners, fillers, hardware, handles and adornments are to be plant-derived or recycled plant-derived materials. Adhesives, finishes, and any other products applied to or integrated into the basic materials of construction are to be naturally occurring materials, and not contain acrylics, plastics, fiberglass, or similar synthetic polymeric materials.
- Materials must not be harvested in a manner that destroys natural habitat. In circumstances where such ecological degradation is suspected, the product manufacturer must retain a “trust provider.”
- Products applied to or integrated into the basic materials of construction cannot contain chemical ingredients that are toxic or otherwise classified as hazardous. The mandatory reportable limits of exposure are defined and listed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). An exception is made for generalized nuisance limits for dusts and mists.
- These products cannot contain chemical ingredients that, through their intrinsic course of action, evolve or release a chemical ingredient as previously defined. They must contain only chemical ingredients that are fully disclosed on a material safety data sheet (MSDS) and cannot contain any chemical ingredient described as a “trade secret.”

Trends in “green” product manufacture and sales

More companies and individuals are undertaking for the industrialized funeral sector what organic farmers and food producers accomplished for the agricultural arena, i.e. meeting consumer demand for alternatives that challenge conventional practices which may have a detrimental environmental impact. These natural grave products are stimulating a renaissance in the weaving arts, with handcrafted or recycled paper and alternative fibers made into caskets and coffins. Artists fashion willow, bamboo, sea-grass, and fibers into woven containers, and sew fabric shrouds of organic cotton, silk and hemp. Each year, more natural versions of traditional funeral goods appear. While eco-friendly supplies for burial were previously sourced from outside the U.S., more U.S. manufacturers are taking part. Purchasing simple wooden caskets and fabric shrouds not only supports local businesses, but also reduces the need for fossil fuels in shipping heavy metal and wooden caskets.

Natural cemeteries

Given the increase in individuals requesting natural burials, the need for natural grounds to accommodate these numbers will also increase. Creating natural burial grounds is also a way to address limited available burial space, and increase open space with recreational, vegetative areas. The United Kingdom (U.K.), for example, utilizes natural burial sites to reestablish the countryside with woodlands and grassy meadows. In the next few decades, green cemeteries will provide a unique opportunity to mix commercial use and land conservation. Sites that had previous uses, e.g. quarries or industrial sites, may be rehabilitated to some extent, and traditional cemeteries with undeveloped land may open to green burials.

Natural grounds do not allow embalming chemicals, metal caskets or reinforced cement with the body. Like natural burials, the goal is to use as few resources as possible to allow the body to decompose quickly. According to Sara Marsden, funeral researcher, “There are approximately 93 registered green burial cemeteries and memorial woodlands in the U.S. These are recognized natural burial sites, although some are hybrid cemeteries where both natural and traditional burials take place (Marsden, 2015).” A green burial cemetery is also sometimes called an eco-cemetery (Marsden, 2015). Since 2005, the Green Burial Council has certified green cemeteries and funeral homes that follow their guidelines, but many more locations are offering natural or green burial options without certification. While different cemeteries have different standards for what they will allow to be buried with the body, minimum green burial standards typically require:

- No embalming fluids.
- Biodegradable casket, but no endangered tropical woods.
- No vault.

Most green cemeteries do not resemble traditional cemeteries, i.e. green manicured lawns and headstones lined up neatly. Natural cemeteries tend to look more like nature preserves, with trees, grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs. There are often walking paths leading visitors to burial areas, with inconspicuous engraved stones marking individual burial sites. Other common features of natural cemeteries are:

- Excavation of the burial site is usually by hand to minimize impacts on the surrounding land and to protect native plant diversity.
- Earth is mounded on top of the gravesite, and the mound eventually disappears as the earth settles. Native grasses, flowers, trees or shrubs may be planted on the mound to quickly rehabilitate the site.
- Caskets and burial shrouds must be made of biodegradable materials. No hardwood caskets are allowed.

- Grave markers are simple, engraved stones indigenous to the area. Sometimes a native tree or shrub is planted instead. To ensure family members will always be able to find a grave, the burial sites are typically marked on a survey map. Some cemeteries insert metal nails at a site so a metal detector can aid in searching. Others use global positioning systems (GPS) to locate sites.

Another important aspect of natural burial grounds is that they also accept cremated ashes for burial or for scattering in a dedicated area. A number of natural cemeteries in Germany house only cremated remains. In these areas, ashes may be scattered or buried, or placed in biodegradable urns buried along the drip line of mature trees and marked with small memorial tags.

Maintenance of grounds

Natural cemeteries’ treatment of the grounds is also quite different from that of traditional cemeteries. Green cemeteries work to preserve natural habitat and wilderness areas instead of altering and manicuring landscapes with non-native plants or grasses that often require large amounts of water and chemical fertilizers. They place trees and plants to mimic the natural environment and try to restore the land to its natural contours.

Many of the trends in natural cemeteries dovetail with other landscaping strategies meant to reduce resource use and labor, and work with, rather than against, the natural environment. In the same way offices are trying to go “paperless” to minimize costs and waste, more grounds are turning to sustainable landscaping principles, also called Xeriscaping or green-scaping (Water Utility Authority, 2011). This means using native, non-invasive plants that are suited to the climate and provide can even provide habitat or food sources for animals such as nesting birds. Irrigation, pesticides and herbicides are not used, or are used sparingly. Sustainable landscaping is low impact, low maintenance, low resource use and low-cost landscaping that fits each particular site and climate.

Greening of the industry

Given the general “greening” of all aspects of society in recent years, it is certain that the funeral industry will continue to go “green” in a range of areas, including in responses to potential environmental risks or to personal risks for members of the profession, by reducing the risks of any toxic materials used or requiring the use of alternative materials.

A recent, closely watched issue of concern to many in the industry is the potential danger of formaldehyde and the possibility of a movement away from its use for both environmental and worker protections. As early as 2004, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) released information suggesting that the use of formaldehyde may increase the risk of nasopharyngeal cancer or leukemia in embalmers. In November 2009, the Journal of the National Cancer Institute published even more definitive and disturbing data regarding exposure to formaldehyde. The study found that death from myeloid leukemia grew with increasing years of embalming experience, confirming that the risk of cancer is associated with the duration of employment, work practices, and estimated worker formaldehyde exposure levels.

Funeral professionals and the organizations responsible for protecting their welfare continue to monitor the international, federal and state regulatory landscape for changes or limits on the use of formaldehyde for embalming purposes in the U.S. Since the IARC and the National Cancer Institute (NCI) declared formaldehyde a carcinogen in 2009, in 2012 and again in 2015, OSHA developed new regulations limiting the use and exposure limits for formaldehyde.

SAFETY CONSIDERATION FOR EMBALMING

As mentioned, the current trend is to move away from the use of hazardous chemicals in the embalming process. To date, formaldehyde is still the embalming fluid of choice because other non-toxic preservation fluids have not been developed that ensure similar results. OSHA and the NFDA continue to research and develop training and guidelines that warn of the hazards of formaldehyde and the precautions that must be taken to mitigate the harmful effects of the toxin on funeral personnel and the environment.

OSHA has produced a fact sheet, summarized below, to explain the effects of formaldehyde exposure as well as precautions that must be in place to protect funeral staff at high risk for exposure to the dangerous chemical. The OSHA Formaldehyde standard (29 CFR 1910.1048) and equivalent regulations in states with OSHA-approved state plans protects workers exposed to formaldehyde and apply to

all occupational exposures to formaldehyde from formaldehyde gas, its solutions, and materials that release formaldehyde. The OSHA information is as follows (OSHA, 2015):

- Formaldehyde is a colorless, strong-smelling chemical often used in aqueous, water-based solutions. It is commonly used as a preservative in medical laboratories and mortuaries.
- The permissible exposure limit (PEL) for formaldehyde in the workplace is 0.75 parts formaldehyde per million parts of air (0.75 ppm) measured as an eight-hour time-weighted average (TWA).
- The standard includes a second PEL in the form of a short-term exposure limit (STEL) of 2 ppm that is the maximum exposure allowed during a 15-minute period.
- The action level, which is the standard's trigger for increased industrial hygiene monitoring and initiation of worker medical surveillance, is 0.5 ppm when calculated as an eight-hour TWA.

Harmful effects on workers

The OSHA fact sheet identifies formaldehyde as a sensitizing agent that can cause an immune system response upon initial exposure and also as a cancer hazard. Acute exposure is highly irritating to the eyes, nose, and throat and exposed individuals cough and wheeze. Subsequent exposure may cause severe allergic reactions of the skin, eyes and respiratory tract. Ingestion of formaldehyde can be fatal, and

long-term exposure to low levels in the air or on the skin can cause asthma-like respiratory problems and skin irritation such as dermatitis and itching. Concentrations of 100 ppm are immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH). Note: The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) considers 20 ppm of formaldehyde to be IDLH.

Routes of exposure

OSHA clarifies that workers can inhale formaldehyde as a gas or vapor or absorb it through the skin as a liquid. Groups at potentially high

risk include mortuary workers as well as instructors and students who handle biological specimens preserved with formaldehyde.

How employers can protect workers

Airborne concentrations of formaldehyde above 0.1 ppm can cause irritation of the respiratory tract. The severity of irritation intensifies as concentrations increase. In the event of an exposure, OSHA requires employers to do the following:

- Identify all workers who may be exposed to formaldehyde at or above the action level or STEL with initial monitoring, and then determine their exposure.
- Reassign workers who suffer significant adverse effects from formaldehyde exposure to jobs with significantly less or no exposure until their condition improves. Reassignment may continue for up to six months until the worker is determined to be able to return to the original job or is deemed unable to return to work.
- Implement feasible engineering and work practice controls to reduce and maintain worker exposure to formaldehyde at or below the eight-hour TWA and the STEL. If these controls cannot reduce exposure to or below the PELs, employers must provide workers with respirators.
- Label all mixtures or solutions composed of greater than 0.1 percent formaldehyde and materials capable of releasing

formaldehyde into the air at concentrations reaching or exceeding 0.1 ppm. For all materials capable of releasing formaldehyde at levels above 0.5 ppm during normal use, the label must contain the words "potential cancer hazard."

- Train all workers regarding exposure to formaldehyde concentrations of 0.1 ppm or greater at the time of initial job assignment and whenever a new exposure potential of formaldehyde is introduced into the work area. Repeat training annually.
- Select, provide, and maintain appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Ensure that workers use PPE such as impervious clothing, gloves, aprons, and chemical splash goggles to prevent skin and eye contact with formaldehyde.
- Provide showers and eyewash stations if splashing is likely.
- Provide medical surveillance for all workers exposed to formaldehyde at concentrations at or above the action level or exceeding the STEL, for those who develop signs and symptoms of overexposure, and for all workers exposed to formaldehyde in emergencies.

Recordkeeping requirements

Employers are required to do the following regarding worker exposure records:

- Retain exposure records for thirty years.
- Retain medical records for thirty years after employment ends.

- Allow access to medical and exposure records to current and former workers or their designated representatives upon request.

For more information on this, and other health-related issues affecting workers, visit OSHA's web site at <http://www.osha.gov>.

NFDA Formaldehyde Best Management Practices 2012

The Formaldehyde Best Management Practices is a working document. It may be updated or modified as important new information about formaldehyde becomes available. The following information is a summary of the best practices guidelines and subsections. It is important to review this document in its entirety on

the NFDA website (NFDA, 2012 a). Preparation room ventilation is the single most important factor in reducing health risks associated with formaldehyde exposure. Make sure that the ventilation system in your funeral home's preparation room is properly designed and operating effectively. An effective ventilation system assures that as

much formaldehyde as possible is drawn away from the embalmer's breathing zone. Consult an HVAC professional to assess and maintain the ventilation system and the heating and cooling needs of the work area. The NFDA provides the following guidelines:

1. Ensure adequate and effective ventilation in the preparation room.
2. Select and use the proper embalming product while considering the environmental, health, and safety characteristics of the product and the condition of the remains.
3. Take precautions in the preparation room to limit formaldehyde exposure and emissions during routine embalming.
4. Observe special precautions to limit formaldehyde exposure and emissions when embalming organ procurement cases and autopsied remains.
5. Be familiar with and follow federal, state, and local environmental, OSHA, and health requirements when embalming is performed.

Various environmental, OSHA, and health requirements apply when an embalming is performed. Often product selection will govern the application of these requirements. Periodically review and re-evaluate the products used in the preparation of the remains. Know the components of the products and the requirements that these components make applicable. Determine whether your locality has a mechanical code or other requirements that apply to ventilation systems.

Formaldehyde Vapor Reduction in the Funeral Home Preparation Room: NFDA Recommendations for Effective Preparation Room Ventilation 2010

This study reached a number of conclusions of critical importance to funeral directors. Several of the key findings are summarized below (NFDA, 2010). The report concludes that an effective ventilation system that is designed, operated, and maintained to meet the criteria in the study, can be effective in removing formaldehyde vapors from the breathing zone of the embalmer in the preparation room and in lowering overall levels of formaldehyde. The NFDA criteria are as follows:

1. The ventilation system should be a dedicated, non-recirculation system.
2. As a general proposition, the minimum air change rate for the preparation room should be no less than 15 air changes per hour.
3. The ventilation system should exhaust more air from the space than it supplies to the space to create a slightly negative pressure

Resomation or alkaline hydrolysis

A new process, called "alkaline hydrolysis (AH)," is available in some states and may soon be available in others. This process may also be termed as bio-cremation, resomation, aquamation, green cremation, flameless cremation, or water cremation. Alkaline hydrolysis is a chemical process that uses a solution of 95% water and 5% potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide to reduce a body to liquids and bone. Embalming fluid and chemotherapeutic drugs are neutralized during the process.

A funeral involving resomation is similar to those involving cremation until the point at which the coffin is removed from view. The whole process takes about three to four hours. The following steps are from the Resomation website (Resomation, 2016):

- First, the body is placed in a stainless steel container, i.e. a resomation unit, that automatically weighs the body and calculates the appropriate amount of water and alkali needed. It then fills the vessel with a solution of lye and potassium hydroxide, heated from 300 to 350 degrees Fahrenheit by steam passing through an internal coil. The vessel is agitated and the potassium hydroxide solution is mixed throughout the process to encourage rapid decomposition.
- Temperatures up to 370 degrees Fahrenheit are maintained for an hour before the vessel is cooled via a water recirculation pump for another hour. When the process is complete, the vessel is drained,

within the preparation room relative to adjacent spaces in the funeral home.

4. The number and location of supply diffusers and exhaust grilles should be adequate to direct a sufficient amount of air across the preparation table(s) so that formaldehyde vapors are transported away from and out of the embalmer's breathing zone.
5. Installation of an LEV device, designed to serve the preparation table(s), will control formaldehyde at its source and enhance the effective operation of a general ventilation system.

The design, installation, maintenance, and alteration of the preparation room ventilation system should always be in consultation with an HVAC professional to ensure the system is functioning effectively to reduce formaldehyde exposure to the greatest extent possible.

NFDA 5-step guide for effective preparation room ventilation

An essential preliminary step for a funeral home is to assemble all information about the current preparation room ventilation system (NFDA, 2010):

- STEP 1. Complete the Formaldehyde Ventilation Assessment: NFDA members may download the Funeral Home Preparation Room Formaldehyde Ventilation Assessment from the NFDA website.
- STEP 2. Complete Expert HVAC Consultation: The NFDA strongly recommends the periodic re-evaluation of the preparation room ventilation system by an expert HVAC consultant.
- STEP 3. Evaluate Recommendations: Evaluate the expert's recommendations to determine the actions to take that will provide the greatest short term and long term benefits.
- STEP 4. Make Simple Changes in Ventilation System: Simple changes in the ventilation system can often result in major improvements, examples of changes include: resizing the exhaust fan; and relocating and resizing the exhaust grille so that it is adjacent to the embalming table(s) near the floor.
- STEP 5. Scheduling Implementation and Maintenance: Establish a schedule to implement the expert's recommendations for improving ventilation system effectiveness and maintaining the funeral home's ventilation system.

Additional studies concerning formaldehyde hazards and precaution guidelines are ongoing and published on the NFDA website.

leaving bone fragments and a sterile, environmentally neutral liquid consisting of amino acids, peptides, sugars, and salts. The liquid can be used as fertilizer and is safe enough to be poured down a drain.

After resomation, bone fragments are bleached in appearance and are whiter than cremation remains (cremains). Like the liquid, the ash can be used in horticulture as fertilizer. Unlike other processes, resomation allows a body to be fully returned to the Earth without adding unwanted materials to the soil. Implants or prosthetics are left behind, and some in remain reusable after sterilization and repackaging.

Many have uncomfortably analogized this process to "pouring bodies down the drain". But this is a characterization that often overlooks the fact that body fluids and blood are routinely poured down the drain during traditional embalming practices (Irving, 2016). Resomation takes takes roughly the same amount of time as cremation, but uses less energy, produces significantly less CO₂, and does not release mercury or other harmful contaminants into the atmosphere. The total carbon footprint of a resomation is 18 times less than that of cremation and is a 100% mercury-free process, unlike embalming or cremation.

The resomation unit is designed to work easily to accommodate a traditional ceremony. The body is placed in coffin lined with a silk bag that seals to become an enclosed silk coffin within the resomator. After

the cycle, the soft bone ash can be powdered and put in an urn, as used with cremation. From the early 1990s to the mid-2000s, AH was used only as a method for disposing animal remains or human bodies that had been left to medical schools for research. More recently, states have been considering adding AH to the methods consumers might choose for body disposition (Ibid).

Supporters of alkaline hydrolysis argue that it is the most environmentally friendly method of body disposition, with the potential to avert the millions of tons of wood, metal, and concrete, as well as hundreds of thousands of gallons of embalming fluid, buried each year in U.S. cemeteries (Ibid). Proponents note that alkaline hydrolysis neutralizes embalming chemicals, toxic drugs such as chemotherapy medicines, and infectious organisms.

Those who oppose alkaline hydrolysis believe there is not enough is known about possible health and safety risks, or feel that AH is not a dignified way to treat human remains. One group, the Catholic Conference of Ohio, was successful in defeating AH legislation. Ohio is reconsidering the issue as a bill proposing the legalization of alkaline hydrolysis is making its way through the state legislature (Irving 2016). Other Catholic groups have concluded that AH is “morally neutral,” and much like cremation.

Alkaline hydrolysis set-up may cost a provider between \$150,000 and \$400,000 depending on the size of the machine as well as the temperature and pressure at which the system can operate. Higher

temperature and greater pressure result in faster decomposition, which allows a provider to handle multiple bodies per day. The AH equipment costs more than traditional cremation machinery. In Minnesota, basic AH service costs about \$2,400, while the cost of direct cremation without an on-site ceremony ranges from \$800 to more than \$4,300, depending on the provider. The national average cost for a traditional funeral, including burial and a headstone or monument, is about \$10,000 (Ibid).

The major barrier to AH is the concern over wastewater discharge. The pH of the resulting solution is modified before disposal, which requires a holding tank. Extensive monitoring in St. Petersburg, Florida showed no adverse effects on water quality. In 2010, a bill, backed by the California Funeral Directors Association defining AH as a type of cremation, was introduced but failed in the California Senate due to concerns regarding the pH of the discharged water (Ibid).

Those who have studied the funeral industry have drawn parallels between this new technology and cremation. Both offer(ed) potential new business, but were/are changing the industry. Many, who at first did not provide cremation assistance because they deemed traditional funerals as the most financially stable, eventually learned that they should accommodate all special requests for business growth and maintenance. Since resomation is operational in some states it would be wise to be informed about this new technology before customers begin to ask for it.

Promession

Promession, developed in Sweden by Susanne Wiigh-Mäsak, is the process by which a body is broken down into compostable, environmentally friendly fragments via treatment with liquid nitrogen. It represents an emerging alternative to cremation. Promession employs a freeze-drying technique to reduce the body to a powdery substance. Advocates believe it is one of the most environmentally friendly means of disposition. The process follows these steps (FuneralSite, 2016):

- Within a week after death, the body is submerged in liquid nitrogen (i.e. 196 degrees Celsius) and is cryogenically frozen to remove water and crystalize the body.
- The brittle remains are then exposed to vibrations that reduce them into a fine, organic powder, weighing about 70% less.

- The powder is dried and any metals present can be removed for recycling.
- Remains can be stored indefinitely when contained in a vacuum-sealed container.
- Exposure to moisture allows natural decomposition,
- The option of a “green” eco-friendly burial includes: The remains are placed in a coffin made of cornstarch, buried in a shallow grave, and turn into compost within six to twelve months. Then a plant, bush or tree can be planted to signify the location of the deceased, and aid in the composting process.

Promession is not available in the U.S. although it is in the experimental stage. There are currently facilities in the U.K., South Korea, and Sweden.

TRENDS IN CREMATION

Cremation rates continue to rise, and funeral homes are adapting to this increased demand by providing the service directly or partnering with a firm. In addition to cremation and the service or ceremony, business revenue can come from video tributes, or merchandise such as urns, keepsake jewelry, chimes, or picture frames that display or hold a portion of the cremains. The reasons for the increasing popularity of cremation include lower costs, ease and convenience, reduced environmental impact, and growing societal acceptance. A

variety of religious and cultural groups that considered cremation taboo have begun to accept cremation as morally neutral.

Preplanning may also have contributed to its increase. While an individual may feel uncomfortable choosing cremation for a parent, they are likely confident in choosing it for their own passing. While cremains are often scattered, they may also be buried in cemeteries or columbarium using minimal resources.

How green is cremation?

Cremation is “green” because traditional burials are resource-intensive and less land is required for housing human remains. It takes an average of 32 square feet to bury a single coffin. But, cremation is associated with drawbacks such as energy use and air pollution:

- Energy use: The natural gas or propane energy needed to accomplish the cremation process is significant. Cremation chambers are heated to between 1,400 and 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit for approximately two-and-a-half hours. Increasingly, the industry is investigating the use of alternative fuels as well

as the use of carbon offsets to minimize the energy impact of cremations, but little progress has been made.

- Air pollution: Cremation chambers emit particulates, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen chloride, dioxin, furans, mercury, cadmium and lead. Mercury emissions from a body’s dental amalgam fillings are a primary concern. The average cremation produces about 50 kg of carbon dioxide, which is the same as driving a car about 136 miles (EPA, 2009).

Making cremations greener

A number of steps that reduce the ecological impact of cremation are becoming standard practice and will likely be incorporated into industry policy soon. The following Green Burial Council aims to minimize the environmental effect of using natural gas, a nonrenewable fossil fuel that contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution (Green B Council):

- Choose a crematory with newer, high-efficiency equipment and ask whether emissions are monitored to ensure they do not exceed allowed limits. Older crematories can use twice as much energy as newer ones.
- To ensure that the crematory consumes a minimum amount of fuel for the task and releases fewer pollutants, all unnecessary items should be removed from the casket before cremation to minimize time and harmful fumes.
- The body should be cremated in a cardboard container or shroud, rather than a casket. If the family members prefer a more traditional looking casket, they can choose a “cremation casket,” which burns more quickly and cleanly. Some prefer to use a temporary “rental casket” for the viewing and move the body to a shroud or cardboard casket before cremation. While no law requires that the body be cremated in a casket, some states do require an “alternative container,” typically a cardboard box. Additionally, family members who want to save money or energy may want to transport the remains from the place of death to the funeral home or crematory. Be sure they are aware that they will need a number of documents including the death certificate, disposition and transit permits from the country registrar, and a cremation permit.
- Choose low-impact handling of cremated remains. Placing the urn in a columbarium, i.e. memorial shelter, requires resources to build the structure as well as for maintenance. Low-impact options include scattering on land or at sea, placement in a decorative urn, or burial.

- Bury the ashes in a biodegradable urn that will harmlessly become part of the earth. Avoid plastic, ceramic and glass or other non-porous containers that do not break down easily.
- Do not bury the urn in a solid burial container. Find a cemetery that does not require the urn to be placed in a concrete or metal container. These containers, designed to withstand the weight of the earth and foot traffic, use resources.
- Find a cemetery that buries urns in smaller plots, rather than in casket-sized plots, to conserve land.
- Choose low-energy methods to scatter the remains. For example, scattering in a local state park, after obtaining appropriate permits, has a lower eco-impact than shooting the remains into space, for example.
- If a business is handling details regarding a scattering of ashes over a body of water, try to minimize the number of vehicles used to limit fuel use as much as possible. Changes may include the number, size or type of vehicle.

While those seeking a simpler, less expensive, and more environmentally friendly funeral and burial alternative often choose cremation, the process does use fossil fuels that do not save land from development nor protect or restore wildlife habitat. Projects like artificial reefs (discussed below) are notable exceptions. In the future, there will likely be certification for crematories with emission controls. Newer cremation chambers often have water scrubbers installed in the exhaust ducts to clean the combustion gases and remove air pollutants, although their effectiveness is in question. A study released by the Cremation Association of North America (CANA) showed that these devices had little effect on emissions and pollutants (CANA, 2016). The Green Burial Council is currently formulating cremation standards, and technologies to reduce or eliminate mercury and other pollutants.

Mercury emissions

Perhaps the least “green” aspect of cremation is the potential mercury emissions that can result from the material used to make dental fillings. Mercury in dental amalgam was considered safe to be used in the mouth because the oral cavity does not come in contact with temperatures high enough for the mercury to vaporize. The heating processes used in crematoriums can vaporize the mercury in dental amalgams, which can eventually build up in the atmosphere, water, and soil.

The most extensive cremation equipment emissions research indicated that the design and operation of typical North American crematories provided significantly better emissions than regulations required (CANA, 2016). CANA provides the following information concerning mercury in the environment, and cremation as a contributing factor:

- Mercury is a naturally occurring element that cycles through our environment, particularly in water.
- The most notable way that mercury enters the cremation cycle is via silver amalgam dental fillings through crematory emissions.
- Silver amalgam fillings contain mercury alloys that volatilize when introduced into the cremation process of intense heat.

- Within the last ten years, the percentage of fillings containing mercury has declined by thirty percent, a significant decrease.
- The changes in dental practices and consumer preferences have resulted in significantly less mercury entering the cremation emissions.
- One of the most detailed studies of mercury emissions impact was conducted in the U.K. where over seventy percent of individuals choose cremation. The study focused on a crematorium that had been in operation for over 40 years, processing more than 112,000 cremations. The concentration of mercury found in the crematory soil samples averaged less than .15 mg/kg, almost seven times lower than that allowed for food production and more than 100 times lower than that allowed for children’s playgrounds.
- Consider that typical North American crematories operate at only twenty percent of the production levels from the study, and it becomes apparent the anticipated impact of mercury emissions are diminished.
- Proper training of crematory operators and managers must be encouraged and older cremation systems should be properly maintained and updated to keep them in prime operating condition.

Creative cremains

The increased demand for cremation has driven a number of other trends associated with the wearing, displaying, scattering or burying of cremains. One of these is the development of dedicated scattering grounds, a small number of which are certified as approved and protected in perpetuity by a deed restriction or a conservation easement. Many of these grounds also allow burial of cremains, though some require a biodegradable container.

One of the inventive ideas for the disposition of remains has been the construction of sections of artificial reef, augmenting existing reefs in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. These memorial reefs are made from cremated remains and concrete, poured into a mold and hardened. They eventually become a marine habitat. Individuals may participate in the creation of the concrete ball, if desired. An outdoor viewing of the reef and its placement are usually arranged. Rules for

disposing or preserving of the cremains must be environmentally sound, if the item is being sold as “green.” An undersea memorial reef must meet the following requirements (EPA, 2016):

- Be manufactured or fabricated from materials that are non-harmful to marine life.
- Be placed only in areas that have been recommended, approved, and permitted for placement by the appropriate governing authority for artificial reef placement.
- Be placed at depths below conventional maritime and recreational traffic.

Keepsakes associated with cremation

The most common purchase associated with cremation is an urn to hold the ashes. Keepsake urns are kept for lengthy periods and must be sturdy enough for this purpose; they are often carefully chosen works of art. Make sure clients are able to distinguish a keepsake urn from an eco-friendly biodegradable urn.

Urns come in many shapes and sizes. Most urns have removable tops to allow placement of the ashes. Environmentally friendly urns are made from sustainable materials, like bamboo, a rapidly renewable wood. Some urns guarantee that they are made from at least fifty percent recycled materials. One urn type is made from post-consumer recycled plastics and claims to use the equivalent of 40 recycled one-gallon milk jugs. Another urn has a semi-porous top in which a tree seedling can be planted. Some urns are specially designed for scattering ashes on the ocean or other large bodies of waters. They float three to five minutes before sinking to the ocean floor and biodegrading. Urns placed in bodies of water may be made with unfired clay that is painted with water-soluble colors, suitable for burial or scattering at sea.

- House human remains in a permanent manner that does not cause harm to the marine environment.
- Have proof of stability testing conducted by an independent agency to ensure that the reef can withstand a Category-3 storm.
- Have operators that use certified divers for all undersea placements of cremated remains.
- Have operators that document every interment.
- Have operators that develop, document and implement a plan to monitor reef growth and maturing of reef.

Keepsake and memory boxes are also perfect for keeping a few mementos, such as a photo, and can store a small sachet of the individual’s ashes, if desired. Cremation jewelry is designed to hold some cremated ashes and comes in the form of pendants, bracelets and other items that have a small container. Most cremation jewelry is worn, but home display options, like glass cases, are available.

Other creative cremation options include:

- Fireworks.
- Launching into space.
- Placement in helium balloons.
- Placement in an hour glass.
- Generate into a diamond.
- Mixed into paint.
- Made into hand blown or stained glass.
- Mixed in tattoo ink.
- Made into a vinyl record.
- Planted as a tree.

FUNERAL MARKETING AND THE INTERNET

The Internet has radically changed the way purchases are made and will continue to influence marketing in every industry. It is estimated that more than 75% of funeral planning begins online. Each day, more consumers are finding potential businesses on the Internet, checking available products and services along with prices, reading reviews and references, and making the decision to contact a particular business for an appointment. All of this within minutes. Not only do a large number of people in the U.S. have access to the Internet, but these consumers

are often the individuals with the most wealth, so a vital part of any business strategy is to assist them in locating services and products on the Internet. Funeral businesses are able to target people looking for their specific products and services. Funeral professionals can put their abilities in front of hundreds of people every day using their website and free social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This new technology considerably expands a funeral professional’s ability to promote his or her business.

Importance of an Internet presence

Businesses need a home page with contact and other basic information and pages dedicated to frequently asked questions regarding services offered, prices, and information about experience and expertise. Funeral homes also may have pages dedicated to appointment reservation and scheduling, allowing clients to book services online. There can also be pages for product reviews, and descriptions or explanations of various services offered. An effective website is an essential part of any business presence and serves as the virtual front door. Research shows that more than half of all Web users evaluate websites based on home pages alone.

While traditional marketing methods and media are important promotional venues, new strategies in marketing utilizing social media networks have become increasingly important in and will continue to grow. Social media networking offers funeral professionals a powerful way to get the word out. It is important, however, that social networking strategies be integrated with other marketing practices and materials. For example, all materials and postings should refer back to the website.

Social media networking

Marketing in the funeral industry is very sensitive. Few people want to discuss their deaths or those of their loved ones before it is absolutely necessary. Internet marketing strategies have the potential to revolutionize funeral marketing, advertising, and sales because they advertise without coming across as “pushy.” This is in part because the audience member, in many cases, has specifically searched for that information, has chosen to receive information, and is choosing to access it at the time and place of his or her preference. The key to this is becoming a preferred information provider, a “friend” on Facebook, for example. Sensitivity and rules of propriety on the Internet are

critical and posting inappropriate or insensitive information will cause a reduction in status.

Social media is a broad term that defines various activities that integrate technology, social interaction and content creation. Through social media, individuals: create web content, organize content; edit or comment on content; and combine and share content. Social media uses many tools such as web feeds, blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, photo-sharing, video-sharing, podcasts, networking, bookmarking, mashups, widgets, virtual worlds and more. Social networking sites

are websites that connect people and create online communities. In these online communities, people can join, and establish a page. Many communities also have discussion groups, typically formed around a theme or industry subject, where members can interact and exchange questions, information and suggestions. Web-based discussion groups include blogging sites and chat rooms.

Social media use among seniors

Not only are young adults using social networking but an increasing number of “Baby Boomers” access social media sites. The number of U.S. citizens using the Internet every day has risen to about eighty-seven per cent of the population, according to Pew Internet data and it continues to grow at an astonishing rate (Pew, 2015). Media budgets are currently contributing about thirteen percent of total marketing dollars spent to social media, according to the American Marketing Association, a number expected to rise to twenty-one percent in the next five years (Brook, 2016).

Funeral services lag behind other businesses in their use of these strategies. This may be due to a natural reluctance to adopt new technologies, or because of a feeling that it is not “suitable” for a dignified funeral business. But many would argue that this is a natural fit, as funerals themselves are a product of social networks, and social networks are used for planning and informing the community when they occur. In the past, social networks operated primarily through religious institutions, like the church, or organizations like the Rotary Club. Now, the Internet has become a community center.

Some may also be reluctant to use social networking sites because they feel the audience is too young. Actually, customers over fifty-five

Facebook

Currently, Facebook is the biggest and most popular social networking site; it is increasingly becoming the “corner post office” or bank where people meet in neighborhood and beyond. Facebook has over one billion participants around the world. Over 32 million Internet users in the U.S. have a Facebook profile. Many social networking sites have a

Blogs

A weblog, which is usually shortened to “blog,” is a website where regular entries are made and presented in reverse chronological order. A blog where individuals write posts. A post is a written item, like a journal entry. Blogs may look like websites, but there are some significant differences in their design and function. In general, blogs are easier to build and maintain. Blogs can offer commentary or news on a particular subject, such as technology, politics or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog

Twitter (i.e. microblogging)

Another form of blogging is the micro-blog. As its name suggests, micro-blogging is simply writing extremely short blog posts, somewhat like text messages. These messages can be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group chosen by the user. Users can read these messages online or have them sent as a message to a mobile device. Twitter has become the way people communicate during disasters as well as celebrations due to its immediacy, simplicity and flexibility.

Twitter limits the writer to 140 characters or less, and is a great way to send short updates to interested parties. Twitter also makes it possible to send messages through mobile phones which may include fees

Social networking sites make it possible to build an audience or community with specialized interests. Web presence becomes intrinsically associated with the business, helping to develop and strengthen relationships. All social networking sites allow users to find people they know among the members or look for other members with similar interests or affiliations, making it easy to establish networks of contacts.

years of age are increasingly using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The fastest growing group of Facebook users are 55 and older: 65% percent of ages 50 to 64, and 49% of people over 65 use social media (according to Pew Internet Research 2015). Not only does the Internet allow businesses to reach this target audience, but it also can target younger audiences interested in finding information.

It is important to remember that unlike like traditional marketing venues, social networking is not about selling. It stresses interaction, educating the public and increasing awareness of the business as a community member. Like traditional networking, social networking stresses community visibility and these sites can facilitate interaction with clients and potential clients. Rather than appearing in the consumer’s life primarily when a person is elderly or ill, one can integrate into the community, present in life as well as death.

While the last generation largely built community ties through church, community, and school organizations, today it is through social media. The following sections briefly introduce the most common social media tools.

particular demographic, or range of characteristics associated with the site. Facebook, like Twitter and YouTube, has experienced exponential growth in a relatively short time, with huge numbers of new users checking in every day. This would be a good site to start building a social networking presence.

combines text, images and links to other blogs, web pages and other media.

Most blogs are primarily textual, although many focus on photographs, videos or audio. Some blogs are very focused on the author’s writing. Others take an editorial approach, with writers searching the Web for interesting content, then writing a short comment, and linking to the original content.

from the phone company. People can receive updates in real time and can participate in two-way communication. Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn also have a micro blogging feature, i.e. the “status update.” Micro blogging can offer:

- Quick answers to simple questions.
- A way to try out new ideas, and garner responses from people whose opinions you trust.
- A way to learn about issues that affect your business before they become common knowledge.
- A way to establish a network of people involved in similar interests, products, and complementary services.

YouTube, podcasts, and video casts

YouTube is the world's second largest search engine, but most know it for its video clips. YouTube provides an easy way to upload short video clips on an unlimited number of topics.

YouTube is a great place to post, but videos can be posted on Facebook and many other networking sites. A video camera can be used to:

- Do a video tour of the funeral home or park.
- Highlight special services.
- Introduce new product information.

A variety of resources can be used to create podcasts and video casts. These are audio and video segments, respectively, of varying lengths

Webcasting

Webcasting is a way to show a funeral in one location to viewers in any location. Large monitors can be set up for a more comfortable viewing experience. Webcasting is a natural solution to situations when family members are scattered or loved ones are unable to attend a funeral due to poor weather, illness or disability, or lack of funds. A recent widespread application of this technology was its use to show the funeral of soldiers to fellow troops who were unable to attend.

Each company providing this service will have its own particular styles. Some prefer that a live feed not be used, but offer viewing

Software applications

The latest and most innovative technology, the funeral planner app, developed for the funeral sector, is an easy way for families to begin planning everything in the privacy of their home on their schedule. Software applications can empower families, providing them with information needed to create a funeral plan. They can select options with family or friends, enabling them to make informed decisions about the funeral service right for them in a comfortable, private setting. This format avoids the pressure of traditional sales tactics that may have been used in the past. Families may review the app so they are familiar with the range of products and services before they visit a funeral business. Apps can be used to simplify services such as:

- Access paperwork anytime.
- Order flowers.
- Capture and store photos, websites, lists, and more.

Personalization and creative services

More individuals are planning their own funerals, creating a memory especially meaningful to the people who knew them. Creating one's own funeral can be a unique and lasting form of expression, providing peace and closure to the individual, and to the bereaved after the loved one's death. In many cases, these ceremonies are preserved in some form, e.g. as an online memorial where people can post their condolences, or a slide show of the individual's life.

"Baby Boomers", making plans for their parents' funerals, are increasingly considering their own services and imagining meaningful services that celebrate their lives, often consciously breaking from tradition. Recent years have seen a more open attitude toward discussions of death; many planning their own funeral get family input beforehand. It is likely that the increasing acceptance of preplanning services opened the door to this practical perspective on the inevitable.

Families may plan a trip to a sporting event rather than go to a wake, or enjoy a trip to a favorite location for the scattering of ashes. There are many other ideas that celebrate something enjoyed in life that

that can be used like personal radio or TV shows, for interviewing, answering frequently asked questions, or discussing a professional topic. Podcasts can be linked to a business's website, blog, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and video casts can be uploaded to YouTube as well as shown on the website or linked to a blog.

Consider, with the family's permission, posting a slide show or video of the memorial of a well-known person in the community. Or, for example, create a radio show with a question-and-answer session regarding cremation. The audio can be played over a slide show of: images about cremation; a tour of the crematory; places to bury cremains; or creative ways to memorialize cremains.

at an URL or on a DVD. The technology required for webcasting is relatively easy and inexpensive to implement, and will likely become more common.

All these technological innovations require technical skills and companies are available for instruction, design, development and troubleshooting as needed. The actual investment in resources to purchase the equipment required to provide these services is minimal, but, like all computer equipment, it requires maintenance and upgrades on a regular basis.

- GPS is convenient to find unfamiliar locations.
- Correct photos and documents instantly and share them without delay.
- A flight-tracking app can give updates when shipping or receiving remains from the airport or when meeting clients.
- Apps can fax messages by capturing an image and sending it to a fax number. Apps can relay information to newspapers, insurance companies, and other vendors in less time and without depending on a fax machine.
- Create customized databases that can be accessed and edited from a desktop or from a mobile phone. Funeral directors can use this app to access their general price list or other arrangement documents when meeting with families.
- Update information instantly.

could be significant to survivors after death. The demand for new and meaningful funerals and memorials has been met by a growing list of services and products. Websites with special software programs that allow the planning of funerals now populate the Internet, providing ideas as well as the means to upload photos, articles, slide shows, and video and audio clips as well as designing memorial boards.

New business models and specialties have also emerged. One funeral home, for example, hires individuals who can design a personalized ceremony, drawing from information provided to them by family and friends of the deceased. These professionals create full-service funeral ceremonies that retell the "life story" of the deceased, based on treasured memories. Writers and graphic artists work to create an emotional connection through words and images. Not only does the company create a beautiful memory, but it makes it a lasting one by creating a keepsake that is given to mourners.

Changing presentations and personalization for viewing

The demand for cosmetic surgery to improve appearances does not end with death. An NBC News documentary, entitled “Final Touch: A Cosmetic Lift for Your Funeral,” interviewed a number of embalmers and restorative artists. The report found that many people consult funeral professionals to plan restorative procedures to enhance their appearance at their funeral. Some of the requests include smoothing lines, plumping lips and even lifting sagging areas for their funeral (NBC, 2008).

“People used to say, just throw me in a pine box and bury me in the back yard,” says Mark Duffey, president and CEO of Everest Funeral, a national funeral planning and concierge service. “But that’s all changing. Now people want to be remembered. A funeral is their last major event and they want to look good for it. I’ve even had people say, ‘I want you to get rid of my wrinkles and make me look younger (Ibid).’”

Restorative artists and embalmers have always tried to restore a “lifelike” appearance. The difference now is the number of people who are preplanning their final touches. This is a new phenomenon in the funeral industry. “I’ve had people mention that they want their breasts to look perky when they’re dead,” says David Temrowski, funeral director of Temrowski and Sons Funeral Home in Warren, Michigan. “Or they’ll say, ‘Can you get these wrinkles out?’ It’s all in humor, but I think people do think more about what they’re going to look like when they’re dead and lying in a casket (Ibid).”

A 2014 ABC News report, “Lifelike Embalming Positions a New Funeral Trend,” noted that funeral plans are becoming more extravagant (ABC, 2014). The trend calls for individuals to be embalmed and presented for viewing in ways that are personalized, and accurately celebrate their life. Rather than the traditional casket viewing and burial, some choose to have loved ones posed in ways that show their hobbies and personalities.

ABC News told the story of an 83-year-old self-professed “party girl” who was embalmed to look as if she was sitting at a party with a glass of champagne. Her “set” included a bright feather boa, patterned outfit, decorative benches, and décor (Ibid). Other stories include a man who was an avid boxer during life, posed standing like a boxer in the ring, complete with a hood and boxing gloves (Ibid), and a jazz musician, standing with instruments, or a young man dressed in leather and posed riding his motorcycle.

One embalmer told ABC that in doing these types of “extreme embalming,” they used different mixtures of fluid so the body would stay stiff in an upright position (Ibid). This type of personalization in funeral presentation rejects the traditional way of displaying the body. Further investigation shows that these highly customized funeral presentations have been practiced for years in some sections of the country, but they are becoming more popular throughout the U.S.

PET FUNERALS

In 2003, the American Funeral Director magazine published its first issue focusing on pet loss and memorialization, signaling a change in the way the human funeral industry addresses companion animal aftercare. Pet memorialization is becoming a big business, associated with keepsake merchandise, formal funerals and scattering ceremonies. People love their pets and seek similar closure and peace after their deaths that they do with their human family members.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, almost half of all pet owners consider pets to be family members (AVMA,

2014). Some even refer to pets as “children” and prefer to call themselves “guardians,” considering it a more accurate description of the relationship. Leading this group of pet owners are “Baby Boomers” who provide their pets a range of animal care services and products including doggy day-care, grooming appointments, chiropractic care, massage therapy, and expensive medical and preventative care. Increasingly, pet owners are also seeking meaningful ways to commemorate these beloved animals’ lives when they die.

Pet disposition

Less than 200 of the thousands of pets that die every day are buried in pet cemeteries or cremated individually. Most other pets are mass cremated. In some cases, pet owners are unaware of what happens to the body if they make no specific demands regarding disposition when the veterinarian euthanizes the animal. Legal regulation involving pet cremation and burial is lacking. While some states are making explicit requirements for consumer protection and transparency, there is still negligence and misrepresentation in the pet loss industry.

Feeding into this is a general lack of knowledge regarding pet burial, cremation and funeral services among the general public who are largely unaware of the choices they have in pet aftercare. Pressed by consumer demand, the industry is changing: pet burial and funeral services are becoming much more mainstream, and professional pet cremation services are increasingly distinguished from permitted animal disposal personnel who transport, mass-cremate, and dispose of

lab animals and road kill. This is in some part because new regulations in some states specify that deceased companion animals are not waste, and that it is illegal to treat them as such.

Those in the business note that memorial services for animals are essentially no different from those for humans. The depth of emotion, the sense of loss, and the need to grieve are very similar.

Many pet services imitate human funeral services, with pet funeral businesses having the facilities associated with human services, such as a chapel and viewing area where people can stay with the pet until the cremation. These facilities also sell urns, markers, caskets, vaults, cards, and jewelry associated with pet burial or cremation.

Those moving into the pet business from human funeral services have found that many best practices for human deaths are appropriate to pet services. Presenting a price list to every family, for example, and making the products and services as transparent as possible are critical.

Statistics

U.S. citizens spend 53 billion annually on their pets. Currently, about 25% of companion animals are buried, and 75% are cremated. Pet funeral business is over 95% dogs and cats, but other animals also require burial or cremation services. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) estimates that 70 to 80 million dogs and 74 to 96 million cats are owned in the U.S. (ASPCA)

(2016). Approximately 37% to 47% of all households in the U.S. have at least one dog, and 30% to 37% percent have at least one cat.

Not only are dog and cat populations on the rise, but many people own a series of pets in their lifetime as the average life span of a dog is 11 years, and of a cat is 14. While these statistics suggest that the potential demand for pet loss and memorialization services is great,

only 700 U.S. facilities offer pet-related services and products. Some funeral professionals came to the market when they themselves were confronted with the death of a family pet and found services lacking.

The primary service requested is cremation and the primary merchandise is urns. Some of the most common aftercare options for pet loss are burial and cremation. About five percent of those who cremate also opt for a funeral or memorial services, and about 20% request a private viewing. Memorials, scatterings and other services are also requested. A survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (2011) found that: about 18% of pet owners would buy an urn for the pet upon death; an additional four percent would buy a headstone for the pet; and about three percent expressed interest in purchasing a casket (American Pet Products Manufacturers Association 2011). In most cases, consumers are unaware of their aftercare options. This makes sense when you learn that the primary group interested in direct sales and pre-planning options, typically senior citizens, is very likely to be pet owners who have not made formal arrangements for the care of their pet. Individuals between 55

and 64 years have two million pets, while those between 65 and 74 years have one million. Individuals over 75 years old have about half a million pets. These pets are mostly dogs, cats, birds, horses, reptiles, and fish, in declining order.

Just as there are local ordinances that dictate how a person's death is handled, there are federal, state, and local regulations regarding the disposition of a pet. Most clients are unaware of the legal issues surrounding pet loss or disposition. Legal regulations associated with pet aftercare relate to a diverse range of issues, including crematory emissions regulation, animal burial restrictions and prohibitions on the misrepresentation or fraudulent claims related to the type of cremation specified. Regulation is likely to become more common in upcoming years.

Pet crematories may belong to the International Association of Pet Cemeteries and Crematories (IAOPCC), which has hundreds of members and offers one-day training sessions. The association also lists suppliers for pet cremation units, urns, caskets, and mementos.

Pet cremation

Perhaps the most significant feature of pet cremations is that they may involve more than one animal. Misrepresentation of this fact has caused pain for pet owners. Many have posted information on the Internet to expose fraudulent practices in pet cremation and keep others from making the same mistakes. However, sometimes the confusion is deliberate. A number of news exposes have appalled the public with cremation horror. A number of lawsuits have resulted in cases where animal remains have been lost or accidentally cremated.

The lack of standardized regulations for pet cremation means violations are likely. Given the lack of oversight, disreputable crematories may operate for years without inspection or registration. It is very important that pet owners and funeral directors engage in transparent cremation where the animal will be handled appropriately.

Practices associated with pet cremation

Many who choose cremation want to see the animal once more prior to cremation. Funeral professionals can preserve the body in a chilling unit, clean, and present the animal in a peaceful way, usually in a curled sleeping position and wrapped in a blanket.

In some cases, those who want private cremation are concerned with the chain of custody and the integrity of the cremation. Pet owners may be worried that they won't get the right animal's ashes back. Some funeral directors use a secure pet tracking system to ensure integrity of the ashes. For the sake of transparency, pet crematoriums typically allow the pet owner to witness the cremation without any additional fees. While most people choose not to witness the pet cremation, this demonstrates the crematorium's good faith operations. Retorts should be positioned so that the viewer can see that there is only one animal in the retort.

Pet cremation restrictions

In some states, there are no laws or legal requirements pertaining to pet cremation or burial services, nor any protection of the pet owner from

misleading practices. Other states have developed regulatory structures in response to cases of misrepresentation or fraud in pet aftercare services, or to address safety issues related to potentially dangerous animal waste. This is likely to be the future trend for other states.

Burial or scattering of cremains

If the pet owner has no place to bury a body, especially that of a large pet, the idea of having the pet's remains cremated and returned, i.e. to bury in a memorial park or other place that has meaning, or kept in a keepsake urn in the home, may be appealing.

Many pet owners choose to scatter a pet's ashes rather than preserve them. Perhaps the favorite location is home's yard. Others choose to create a meaningful service or ceremony out of scattering the ashes, e.g. in a memorial park, over a body of water, or into the wind. While the practice of scattering a pet's ashes is subject to local legal guidelines, prohibitions are rarely enforced. Some aftercare providers mail the family a certificate commemorating the scattering with the details of time, date, and exact location.

Keepsakes associated with pet cremation

The most common purchase associated with pet cremation is an urn to hold the ashes. Pet cremation urns are typically decorative cremation containers that are designed to honor the memory of the beloved pet. They may be personalized with the pet's name, photo, or paw print.

The industry has seen an increasing demand for memorialization products of high quality. Artists create beautiful urns and cremation jewelry. Family members may want to keep some fur or cremains placed in keepsake jewelry, or place a paw print in clay before cremation or burial. Keepsake and memory boxes are also perfect for keeping a few mementos of a dearly departed pet after the burial. Keepsakes and memory boxes can store smaller items such as a small sachet of the pet's ashes, photos, a collar, or a bandana.

Animal burial restrictions

Perhaps the ideal burial location for most family pets is their backyard, but many towns and cities prohibit burying an animal anywhere but in an established cemetery; however, enforcement is not strict. The legalities of burying a pet vary greatly from place to place. In rural areas and small towns, one may be able to bury a pet on private property, as long as the owner gives permission. If the pet owner does not own the property, it is highly unlikely that they will be within their legal rights to bury a pet without the property owner's permission.

In cases where burial is legally permissible, many localities have rules intended to protect the environment. These may be county health

regulations, or other rules that include specific details regarding the depth of the grave, the materials in which the pet is buried, the manner in which the grave is marked, and the vicinity of the grave to water sources. The rules are primarily intended to prevent health hazards, e.g. assuring that graves are deep enough to protect humans and other animals from disease, and shallow enough to avoid underground utility lines. Some areas require that a pet be buried in an approved pet casket to help assure that toxic materials are not buried with the animal, or that caskets will biodegrade. Regulations also stipulate that graves are properly marked so that future landscapers will not stumble upon

remains unexpectedly, exposing themselves to potential disease. And finally, the rules aim to protect public drinking water sources from contamination caused by the biological breakdown of a pet's body.

The county health department, city hall, or animal control department should be able to provide legal guidelines regarding pet burial.

Pet cemeteries

As of 2016, around 600 pet cemeteries existed in the U.S., with a location in just about every state; most are privately owned. Many pet cemeteries offer full burial and cremation services, typically picking up the pet from the family's home or a veterinarian's office. Some pet cemeteries and humane shelters offer communal burials, which mean that multiple animals are buried in a common location.

Private pet burial in a pet cemetery typically means a traditional burial, where the pet's body is placed into an air and/or watertight casket, or in case of a green burial, a biodegradable casket. This is followed by interment in a private grave at a deed-restricted pet cemetery where the family has visitation rights. Burial in a pet cemetery can be very comforting for the pet owner, as it ensures that the pet's remains will be cared for, and there is no need to worry about what will happen if the family moves.

Pet funerals and memorials

Pet funerals are becoming more common, with some cemeteries offering multiple or tiered burials, where a number of cremated pets or multiple burials are placed in a single grave. Funeral and memorial providers offer burial and cremation services, and provide caskets, urns and grave markers designed specifically for pets.

Like a human funeral home, a pet funeral facility may include a viewing room, an arrangement room, a reception area, and a room with merchandise. If desired, pet loss specialists can provide information geared to parents and children to help them discuss death. Often a child's first loss is a pet. This type of information is very helpful, but must be geared to the appropriate age group.

There are many beautiful ways to commemorate pets. Both home and cemetery burial provide an opportunity to create a permanent

Coexisting services

Given the novelty, in some areas, of pet funerals, some traditional funeral directors may feel uncomfortable about conducting or arranging pet services. Concurrently, there is a concern that it will jeopardize human services by alienating current clientele.

Some studies suggest that those who decide to attend to both human and nonhuman aftercare may find it beneficial to position these businesses as two separate entities in clearly distinct facilities. This makes practical sense, as each facility requires different size retort and caskets, as well as different keepsake items. In some cases, this is a legal requirement. The state of Florida, for example, does not allow a pet retort to be located within the same facility as a human retort.

Combined human and pet burial grounds

Some pet owners would like to be buried with their pets. In England, a small number of cemeteries are providing sections where people and pets can be buried together. It is just beginning in the U.S. but this type of burial arrangement is prohibited in many states. Policies are changing in response to the demand and some new laws facilitate placing humans and pet remains together. Florida residents who want to be buried with their dog, cat, parrot or other pet, for example, may do so under a law created in 2007 informally called "the Felix and Fido Amendment" that allows people to be buried with the ashes of their pet as long as the animal's remains are in a separate container.

Unfortunately, in many cases, rules regarding the burial of pets are vague and hard to discover. For those who do not have a backyard or for those who plan to move in the future, a backyard burial may not be a viable option. In some cases, burial of ashes is preferred as the urn can be removed from the ground, if necessary.

Increasingly, pet owners are making formal funeral and memorial service arrangements for their departed pets. Family members may purchase a plot, casket and grave marker in a preplanning counseling session, just as one would for a family member. Full-service pet cemeteries can usually provide any type of memorial desired, with much the same products and services found in people cemeteries, with a variety of services and products ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars.

Best practices suggest that cemeteries should always provide pet owners with a copy of their burial contract, i.e. a detailed list of information regarding the terms and conditions for burying the pet in that particular cemetery.

memorial to one's pet, using a grave marker, statue, or perhaps a tree planted over the pet's grave to serve as a living memorial. Pet funeral products can include:

- Music.
- Floral arrangements.
- Urns.
- Caskets.
- Grave markers.
- Video tribute/slide show.
- Stationary/memorial notices.
- Keepsakes.
- Garden memorials.
- Cards.

There are cases, however, of human and pet services that co-exist successfully. Certainly, more people are requesting to be buried or cremated with a companion animal, and because so many senior citizens own pets and may have a need for pet cremation services, industry professionals have wondered if one should attempt to combine human and pet services in one facility, or keep them distinct. Since there are no clear statistics, it is best to follow community standards and practices regarding decisions about co-mingling services.

Current trends suggest there need be no stigma associated with pet services if the services and products are handled ethically and professionally, and clients' emotional needs are met.

According to Elderlaw (2016):

Most states either have laws specifically prohibiting pets and humans to be buried together or are silent on the issue. At least four states have laws allowing some form of combined burial, and the list will undoubtedly grow as demand increases. New York and New Jersey allow cremated human remains to be buried with a pet, but only in a pet cemetery. New York's pet cemeteries cannot charge a fee for the service and are barred from advertising that they offer it. Since about 2006, Pennsylvania allows cemeteries to have three sections, one for humans, one for pets, and an area for

both. While no zoning ordinances specifically restricted this, it was necessary to get an ordinance to formally set out each area, noting a line of demarcation among the three separate areas. Virginia passed a law in 2014 permitting cemeteries to have clearly marked sections where pets and humans may be buried alongside one another. However, the pet must have been a companion animal under Virginia law and must have its own casket.

Funeral directors may exercise discretion when they have a request to place personal objects, such as the cremated remains of a pet in the owner's coffin. "Not a day goes by when I do [not] put an urn of an animal into the casket of a human being secretly for a family," Coleen Ellis, co-chair of the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance (PLPA). "So, while it's been going on for a very long time, the trend is becoming more recognized where people are getting permission to do it (Elderlaw, 2016)."

Death notices for pets

Websites and publications such as newspapers or newsletters provide another opportunity to formally post or list a death notice to commemorate a pet or let people know when a memorial service will be held. More newspapers are including a pet obituary section near the pet section of the paper. Some publication and online sites allow individuals to post photos or articles about a beloved pet.

The demand for pet obituaries, like that for funeral or memorial ceremonies, is growing. Newspapers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Tucson, Arizona, and Youngstown, Ohio, all have pet obituary sections. Many pet loss centers and pet tribute sites make it easy

to post information. There are also websites associated with memorializing pets. Many have no association with other death industry or funeral services, but provide a location where pet owners can express grief openly for their pet. Web support groups also are associated with pet loss sites. Sites like <http://www.critters.com> is a place where pet owners and professionals can post a memorial, including text, photos, a slide show and music, kept forever on the archive. Custom memorials include layout and design services as well as scanning and placement of photos, with increasing fees for more services.

Trusts for long-term pet care

The Uniform Probate Code (UPC) adopted by the 1990 National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws changed probate law to include a provision allowing for the care of a pet after the owners' death. Section 2-907(b) allowed enforceable trusts for the care of a designated domestic animal and the animal's offspring. In 2000, the provision was updated and Section 408 of the Uniform Trust Code (UTC) addressed a trust for any animal. Authorizing persons with an interest in the welfare of the animal to petition for appointment or removal of an enforcer of the trust (AVMA, 2014).

Currently, 47 states have included UPC legal provisions or have adopted their own version of legislation for animal welfare trusts. A pet trust allows a person to set aside a sum of money to care for the pet and specifies the manner of distribution. Owners often include specific instructions regarding feeding, housing, and veterinary care. Mississippi adopted such a law in 2014, based on Section 408 of the UPC. Highlights of the law are included below (Trust for Care of Animal AMVA, 2014):

- A trust may be created to provide for the care of an animal that outlives the owner. The person who creates a trust designates a trustee to manage and administer all profits that would go to a beneficiary, in this case, the animal. The term settlors refers to the owner of the pet who set up the trust for the welfare of the pet. The

trust normally ends upon the death of the animal or the trust may be written to provide for the care of more than one animal alive during the settlor's lifetime, upon the death of the last surviving animal.

- A trust may be enforced by a person appointed in the trust. If no one is named in the trust, a person may be appointed by the court. A person interested in the welfare of the animal may petition the court to appoint a person to enforce the trust or to remove the appointed person to protect the welfare of the animal.
- Property of a trust authorized by this section may be applied only to its intended use, except to the extent the court determines that the value of the trust property exceeds the amount required for the intended use. Unless otherwise provided in the trust, property not required for the intended use must be distributed to the settlor, if living, otherwise to the settlor's successors in interest.
- Some individuals donate any remaining property to a nonprofit animal welfare organization upon the pet's death.

Kentucky, Louisiana and Minnesota are the only states that do not have laws authorizing pet trusts. As this is a complex area of the law, pet owners considering a trust for their animal should consult an attorney familiar with a given state's pet trust law.

Conclusion

From home funerals, pet memorials, and resomation to apps, and poses on motorcycles, the funeral industry is changing. Industry professionals must adapt to the keep pace with demands of the public. Innovation and creativity are required to find a niche in this industry depending on the customs and mores of the community served.

To stay viable, the industry must remain on the cutting edge of technology to evaluate analyze emerging trends that will drive the products and services that must be offered to sustain business.

The funeral industry must be ready to change course and be prepared to meet the diverse needs of clients without judgment while maintaining community standards and ethical practices.

Since no single business can accommodate all of the trends covered in this course, it might be productive to build a network of businesses that can specialize in certain areas and collaborate to provide complimentary services. In this way, business can build on their expertise and work together to provide a variety of services in a geographic area, while meeting diverse needs and keeping business in the local community.

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CURRENT TRENDS IN THE FUNERAL INDUSTRY

Final Examination Questions

Select the best answer for each question and mark your answers
online at **Funeral.EliteCME.com**.

1. Preplanning and prepaying are not the same, and AARP and the FCA do not recommend prepayment, in general.

True False
2. When dry ice evaporates, it releases carbon dioxide.

True False
3. The mission of ecobalming is to develop environmentally safe embalming practices that preserve the body, as part of a "green" burial process.

True False
4. The number of backyard burials has decreased dramatically in the past decade.

True False
5. Because flowers must enter the U.S. pest-free, farmers often saturate the flowers with pesticides and other chemicals, many of which are banned or restricted in the U.S.

True False
6. Natural grounds do not allow embalming chemicals, metal caskets, or reinforced cement with the body.

True False
7. Employers should label all mixtures or solutions composed of greater than 0.1 percent formaldehyde, and materials capable of releasing formaldehyde into the air at concentrations reaching or exceeding 0.1 ppm.

True False
8. As a general proposition, the minimum air change rate for the preparation room should be no less than 50 air changes per hour.

True False
9. While no law requires that the body be cremated in a casket, some states do require an "alternative container," typically a cardboard box.

True False
10. A Florida law created in 2007 informally called "the Felix and Fido Amendment" allows people to be buried with the ashes of their pet.

True False