

Cremation Overview

Information Provided by The Cremation Association of North America

The information in this article is intended to help you more fully understand what occurs in the cremation process. The steps are detailed and should be carefully considered.

Please note that this article has been prepared on a general informational basis. Because of variations in state/provincial and local laws, there may be some difference in legal requirements.

Before Cremation Takes Place

Before cremation takes place, any scheduled ceremonies, rites of passage, or viewings have been completed. All authorization forms and permits must be completed and signed.

The funeral director or cremation provider should be made aware if the decedent has a pacemaker, prosthesis, or any other mechanical or radioactive devices or implants, as they may have to be removed prior to cremation. If such devices or implants should have been removed and were not, then the person(s) authorizing the cremation will be responsible for any damages caused to the crematory or crematory personnel by such devices or implants. The funeral director or cremation provider should also be made aware if the decedent was recently treated with any radioactive medication.

All personal possessions or valuable materials, such as jewelry or dental gold, if so desired, should be removed by you or your designated agent prior to the time the decedent is transported to the crematory. Due to the nature of the cremation process, any materials not removed from the casket/container prior to cremation will be destroyed, or, if not destroyed, will be disposed of by the crematory in a non-recoverable manner in accordance with applicable laws.

Most crematories require the body to be cremated in a combustible, leak-proof, rigid, covered container, if a casket is not being used.

Non-combustible materials on caskets, such as decorative handles or rails, latches, etc., which could cause damage to the cremation equipment, may be removed prior to the cremation and disposed of by the crematory in a non-recoverable manner. Some states/provinces and some crematories do not allow metal caskets to be used in cremation. If a metal casket is used, the remnants of the metal casket shell will be disposed of by the crematory in a non-recoverable manner following the cremation.

Depending on the state/provincial and local laws, there may be a waiting period of up to 48 hours from the time of death before the human remains may be cremated.

The crematory must be notified if anyone wishes to witness the casket/container being placed in the cremation service. If witnessing is offered, the crematory may require a waiver or hold-harmless agreement to be signed to protect it from any liability.

The crematory should be provided with an urn in which the cremated remains will be placed. If no urn is provided or the urn is not large enough to hold all the remains, the crematory will place the remains or any excess in a container made of plastic, light metal, cardboard, unfinished wood, or other suitable material to hold the remains until an urn is acquired or the cremated remains are scattered.

Source: <http://www.funeralplan.com/funeralplan/cremation/beforecremation.html>

The Cremation: Processing the Remains

All cremations are performed individually. Exceptions can be made only in the case of close relatives, and then only with the prior written instructions of the authorizing agent(s) and only if the state/provincial or local laws allow this.

The cremation process begins with the placement of the casket/container in the cremation chamber where it's subjected to intense heat and flame reaching temperatures between 1,400 and 1,800 degrees. All substances are consumed except bone fragments (calcium compounds) and any non-combustible materials, such as jewelry, dental gold, prostheses, latches, hinges, etc., that were not removed prior to cremation as the temperature is not sufficient to consume them.

During the cremation process, it may be necessary to open the cremation chamber and reposition the deceased in order to facilitate a complete and thorough cremation.

The time for cremation to be completed varies with the size and weight of each human remains, but usually takes between 1 1/2 and 3 hours.

Following a cooling period, the cremated remains are then swept or raked from the cremation chamber. Every effort is made to remove all human remains. However, a small residue may remain in the cremation chamber, resulting in incidental commingling with other cremated remains.

After the cremated remains are removed from the cremation chamber, all non-combustible materials that have not been removed prior to cremation will be separated and removed from the bone fragments by visible or magnetic selection and will be disposed of by the crematory in a non-recoverable manner.

Once the bone fragments have been separated from the other material, they may be further processed to reduce the size of the bone fragments to uniform particles.

Cremated remains, depending on the bone structure of the decedent, will weigh between three and nine pounds, and are usually white in color, but can be other colors due to temperature variations and other factors.

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Source: <http://www.funeralplan.com/funeralplan/cremation/cremationprocessing.html>

After the Cremation Has Been Completed

The urn or the container containing the cremated remains will be returned to you or the individual cemetery or funeral home you have designated on the cremation authorization form.

If you and/or other family members have not already decided on the final resting place for the cremated remains, you may wish to consult the professional who assisted you on the many options available. These options include:

- placement of the urn containing the cremated remains in an indoor or outdoor mausoleum or columbarium
- interment of the urn containing the cremated remains in a family burial plot or in a special urn garden that many cemeteries provide for cremated remains
- scattering of the cremated remains in a cemetery garden especially created and dedicated for this purpose
- scattering the remains at sea or on land in accordance with state/provincial or local laws
- the urn may, of course, also be taken to the home of a loved one, but plans should be made for an eventual permanent resting place.

If scattering is done, you may wish to choose a site for a permanent memorial, such as placing the name of the deceased in a Book of Remembrance or on a plaque for a special location, or planting a tree in remembrance. Any of these will provide a place of pilgrimage for those who want to remember and celebrate the life of the loved one.

Source: <http://www.funeralplan.com/funeralplan/cremation/aftercremation.html>