

**b. Disposition of the body: donation, cremation, burial**

Since the 2018 edition of this book some new situations require some supplementary information and resources:

**A. Deaths caused by COVID-19:**

The *Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administrations* has detailed requirements relating to postmortem care, including advice that cremation or burial should take place as soon as possible after death.

Several aspects of the Coronavirus pandemic have changed choices and ceremonies following deaths in 2020, according to the *World Health Organization* (resource below):

1. *Funerals and other memorial services or meetings* cannot take place physically while many of the participants are practicing sheltering in place or social distance in order to prevent the spread of the virus.
2. *The bodies of those who died while experiencing COVID-19* need to be handled minimally and disposed of relatively quickly by people with adequate protection against the spread of the virus, without embalming, beautification for viewing, or opportunities for survivors to express their farewells by touching the body. Cremation and burial are appropriate. If there is a viewing, children and people over 60 should avoid the viewing.
3. *Items touched within a week or two by the person who died* should be washed at high temperature, or disinfected.

The *National Funeral Directors' Association* notes that National Cemeteries for veterans are not providing military honors during the pandemic, and that fewer than 10 people will be permitted to attend any memorial services or burials in those cemeteries. It also indicates that no U.S. State is restricting modes of cremation or burial at this time, although Nevada initially prohibited burial.

The *Catholic Cemeteries of the Los Angeles Archdiocese* has established the following rules regarding burials in their cemeteries, which may be instructive for others as well:

- In accordance with guidance and orders regarding public gatherings, all Catholic Cemeteries and Mortuaries will be temporarily closed for regular visitation and non-essential business matters until further notice.
- Cemetery and Funeral arrangements will be made by phone, online or by email.
- There will be a limit of (2) family members allowed for in office funeral or cemetery arrangements.
- One person may view the decedent to confirm the identity as required by the mortuary or funeral home.
- Graveside service may be attended by members of one household of up to ten (10) people (members who live together at the same physical address); Essential funeral service staff and one clergy member.
- Attendees must adhere to social (physical) distancing of at least 6 feet between the group of household members, the funeral staff and clergy member.
- If desired, family member or mortuary staff may film committal service.
- Assistance will be provided to schedule a memorial Mass at later date upon request.

New York State has similar Cemetery Regulations, but in addition they recommend that, if possible, funerals and burial services should be live-streamed, should be held outside with social distancing, and should not involve travel from distant locations.

*The Disaster Distress Helpline, 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746: 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Toll-free, multilingual, and confidential.*

***B. Green or Natural Burials:***

In view of Global Warming and the Testimony of Simplicity, some Friends are turning to traditional methods of preparing bodies for burial, so they are having them buried soon after death in a simple shroud or cardboard or wooden casket without embalming or other changes to the body. This has been found to consume quite a bit less energy (and money) than more conventional methods of disposition of the body.

Evidently there are no State or District laws prohibiting next of kin or other person designated by the decedent in a notarized document from filing a death certificate and providing directly for the burial of a relative, although those filings may not be possible while stay-at-home orders are in force. There are local requirements that require notification of any burial on private property. The body must be either embalmed or refrigerated if its burial occurs more than 48 hours after death, for obvious reasons. The National Home Funeral Alliance has advice and encouragement for those who wish to follow this path.

A few cemeteries and funeral homes in Baltimore Yearly Meeting's area have been certified by the Green Burial Council. Some other "hybrid" cemeteries permit green or natural burials among the more conventional burials. The WHO advice relating to COVID-19 generally also has specific advice relating to these natural or green burials, as they are practiced widely in other cultures.

***Add to b.1's Related Resources (in addition to those in Planning Ahead):***

***A. Resources Relating to Deaths from COVID-19:***

Catholic Cemeteries and Mortuaries: <https://catholiccm.org/covid-19/>

National Funeral Directors' Association, <https://www.nfda.org/covid-19/cremation-burial>

New York State Division of Cemeteries, Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Procedures: <https://www.dos.ny.gov/cmtty/index.html>

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, COVID-19, Postmortem Care Employers and Workers: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/controlprevention.html#deathcare>

World Health Organization, Infection Prevention and Control for the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19: [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC\\_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331538/WHO-COVID-19-IPC_DBMgmt-2020.1-eng.pdf)

**B. Resources Relating to Green or Natural Burials:**

Burial Planning.com has a page, Natural Burials: Questions and Burial Options: <https://www.burialplanning.com/burial-types/natural-burials/> that describes and distinguishes natural burials from green burials, with links to further information.

Green Burial Council, GBC Certified Cemeteries and GBC Certified Funeral Homes: [https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/funeral\\_products.html](https://www.greenburialcouncil.org/funeral_products.html)

National Home Funeral Alliance: <https://www.homefuneralalliance.org>

Slocum, J. and Carlson, L., (2011) *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death*. Hinesburg, VT, Upper Access, Inc.