

# Using a Funeral Home vs. Doing a Home Funeral

Important information on what the difference is, what the responsibilities are for families and designated agents, and how to plan accordingly

**In the state of New Mexico, it is not required that families use a funeral home to bury their loved one. It is a family's right to care for their own loved one if they wish, and the process of a home funeral can be very rewarding and therapeutic for some. However, it is very important that the Next of Kin, or the person designated to carry out someone's final wishes fully understands the laws associated with home funerals and agrees to their responsibilities in acting as the "funeral service practitioner"**

## **Important note about us:**

Natural Burial New Mexico is strictly a natural burial service/burial ground caretaker and does not have licensed funeral directors on staff. This means that there are limitations to the services that we can provide on our own. All of the services that we provide are listed in our "What We Offer" page on our website:

<https://www.naturalburialnewmexico.com/what-we-offer.html>. Examples of services that are provided by licensed funeral directors that we cannot provide are:

- Filing death certificates
- Overnight, or multi-day refrigerated storage of a body
- Removing and disposing of body bags
- Cosmetic repairs to the body
- Cremation of a body

We will work with any funeral home that agrees to the requirements of natural burial (i.e. no embalming and only biodegradable containers). We have worked with the majority of funeral homes in the Albuquerque area, and have worked with numerous funeral homes in the Santa Fe, Belen, and Los Lunas areas.

**If the family or designated agent decides they want to do a burial without the aid of a funeral home, they are by default opting to do a "Home Funeral" or "Home Burial".** We hope that this pamphlet will help to provide clarity on what the difference is between using a funeral home and doing a home funeral, and how to properly prepare for either scenario.

Funeral Home	Home Funeral
<p><b>Funeral Home Definition</b></p> <p>A Funeral Home is an establishment where the dead are prepared for burial or cremation by a licensed, professional funeral director or mortician</p>	<p><b>Home Funeral Definition</b></p> <p>A home funeral is a family or community-centered response to death and after-death care. The family or legally designated agent takes on the role of the ‘funeral service practitioner’</p>
<p><b>Services that funeral homes can provide for a natural burial at La Puerta Natural Burial Ground</b></p> <p>Basic services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Filing the death certificate</li> <li>● Initial pickup and cold storage of the body prior to burial (an unembalmed body can be stored in refrigeration for weeks)</li> <li>● Basic body care and shrouding or casketing of the body</li> <li>● Transportation to the burial ground <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NOTE: Natural Burial New Mexico can also provide the transportation from the funeral home to the burial ground if the funeral home is located in Bernalillo or Valencia counties</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Tasks that will be carried out by the Next of Kin or Designated Agent if they opt not to use a funeral home and do a home funeral instead</b></p> <p>Required tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Filing a death certificate with the State’s Office of Vital Records and Statistics within 5 days of death, and PRIOR to burial. NM law explaining this requirement is <a href="#">NM Stat § 24-14-20 (2018)</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NOTE: We work with a few funeral homes that will file death certificates for families without requiring any other funeral services to be purchased, which allows for the burial to occur prior to having the death certificate completely filed. This service is paid for at the time of need and cannot be prearranged, and must be initiated through Natural Burial New Mexico.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Keeping the body at home until the burial occurs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New Mexico law allows a body to remain outside of refrigeration for up to 24 hours after death.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<p>Optional services that a funeral home can provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dressing of the body in special burial clothing</li> <li>● Use of a chapel or indoor gathering space for funeral services or a wake</li> <li>● Provide a private space for family or clergy to perform body care or anointing ceremonies</li> <li>● Obituary</li> <li>● Escorted funeral procession to the burial ground</li> <li>● Cosmetic fixes or autopsy repairs prior to burial</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If the burial does not occur within 24 hours, the family or designated agent will be responsible for actively cooling the body's torso and back with frozen gel packs until the time of burial. Ice packs should be switched out with freshly frozen packs at least every 10 hours. If the body's core is actively cooled, the burial can occur up to 72 hours (3 days) after death.</li> <li>● Transportation to La Puerta Natural Burial Ground for the burial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A burial-transport-permit must be acquired from the local registrar by the family or designated agent prior to burial <u>if the death certificate is not being processed by a licensed funeral director or direct disposer</u>. <b>If the family is using a funeral home to file the death certificate, they do not need to get a transit permit.</b> See law <a href="#">NM Stat § 24-14-23 (2018)</a> for full explanation. The transit permit is obtained when you get the death certificate from the Office of Vital Records and Statistics.</li> <li>○ NOTE: Natural Burial New Mexico may offer to do the transportation of the body to the burial ground on behalf of the family or designated agent <u>if the pick up location is within Bernalillo or Valencia Counties</u>. However, <u>this service is not guaranteed</u>, and the family or designated agent must be prepared to keep and care for the body for up to the 72 hour window to allow for us to have appropriate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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	<p>staff to accommodate for the transportation and burial. Also note that the family would still be responsible for obtaining the transit permit prior to us transporting to the burial ground if they are not having a funeral home file the death certificate for them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shroud or casket the body prior to transportation to La Puerta Natural Burial Ground - this will require 2-3 people to participate, depending on the weight of the deceased. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NOTE: If Natural Burial New Mexico is providing the transportation to the burial ground, we will help with the shrouding and casketing of the body.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Optional things families or designated agents can do for home funerals and natural burial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Washing and/or anointing the body in the home</li> <li>● Dressing the body in special burial clothing</li> <li>● Plan for a wake in the home</li> <li>● Plan any services or ceremonies for the burial</li> <li>● Hire clergy for religious services</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Process for people using a funeral home to prepare for natural burial at La Puerta Natural Burial Ground</b></p> <p><u>If you make pre-arrangements with a funeral home:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell them that you will be doing a natural burial and will be buried at La Puerta Natural Burial Ground through Natural Burial New Mexico LLC. Provide them with our contact information so they can coordinate with us at the time of need.</li> <li>• If you would like to pre-arrange burial services with us as well, you will work with us directly to secure the plot and biodegradable container. <u>The opening and closing of the grave must be purchased at the time of need, and cannot be prepaid for.</u> You may also just secure the plot prior to time of need and have the container and opening and closing purchased at the time of need.</li> <li>• At the time of death, your Next of Kin, Designated Agent, or hospice nurse will contact the funeral home you have pre-arrangements with for the initial pickup and storage of the body. Then, either the funeral home or your Next of Kin will contact us to let us know that the death has occurred, and we will arrange for the burial date and time. Any outstanding burial services (i.e. opening and closing of the grave and/or biodegradable container) will be secured and paid for at this time.</li> <li>• Your Next of Kin or Designated Agent will work directly with the funeral home to provide the necessary</li> </ul>	<p><b>Process for natural burial at La Puerta Natural Burial Ground for people opting not to use a funeral home and do a home funeral instead</b></p> <p><b>NOTE: If at all possible, we ask that people give us a heads up if someone goes on hospice so that we can be prepared to provide efficient and effective service at the time of need.</b></p> <p><u>If you have a funeral home process the death certificate for you:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the time of death, the Next of Kin or Designated Agent will have the hospice nurse declaring death call us immediately to notify us of the death and provide intake information that we will pass along to the funeral home so they may put the death certificate in process.</li> <li>• The Next of Kin or Designated Agent will ensure that the hospice nurse remove all superficial medical equipment from the body.</li> <li>• The Next of Kin or Designated Agent should ensure that the head is elevated to keep any contents still in the stomach from coming up.</li> <li>• We will work with the Next of Kin or Designated Agent to plan the burial time and date (either within 24 hours without active cooling, or up to 72 hours with active cooling)</li> <li>• If Natural Burial New Mexico is providing the transportation to the burial ground (for people within Bernalillo and Valencia counties only, and based on availability), the Next</li> </ul>

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<p>information to process and file the death certificate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Once the funeral home acquires the necessary information for initiating the death certificate, the burial may occur.</li> </ul> <p><u>If pre-arrangements were not made with a funeral home:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● At the time of death, the Next of Kin, Designated Agent or Hospice Nurse could either call us immediately and we can help get a funeral home dispatched to do the initial pickup and storage OR they may contact a funeral home directly.</li> <li>● If a funeral home is contacted directly, your Next of Kin or Designated Agent will need to explain to them that they are doing a natural burial and they would like the burial to occur at La Puerta Natural Burial Ground.</li> <li>● Your Next of Kin or Designated Agent will work directly with the funeral home to secure all required or desired funeral services.</li> <li>● Your Next of Kin or Designated Agent will work directly with us to secure burial services.</li> <li>● We will work with the funeral home and your Next of Kin or Designated Agent to arrange for burial time and date.</li> <li>● Your Next of Kin or Designated Agent will work directly with the funeral home to provide the necessary</li> </ul>	<p>of Kin or Designated Agent must be prepared to keep the body at the home for up to the 72 hour window to allow for us to have the staff and resources to provide the pickup and transport on their behalf.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NOTE: Natural Burial New Mexico does not do burials outside of daylight hours. If the death occurs outside of daylight hours, the family will have the body stay at home overnight, at a minimum, prior to the burial.</li> <li>● The Next of Kin or Designated Agent will prepare the body for transport to the burial ground: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If wanted, perform any body care, anointing, or dressing in special clothes for burial. If possible, we recommend dressing the person in the desired burial clothing prior to their final breath. It is much easier to dress a live person. They may also cut the clothing up the back and tuck it around the decedent to make it easier.</li> <li>○ If wanted, they can keep the eyes closed by placing a sock full of rice or beans over the decedent's eyes. They can also keep the mouth shut by tying a bandana or scarf around the head and jaw.</li> <li>○ Shroud or casket the body (NBNM will aid with this if we are doing the transportation)</li> <li>○ If NBNM cannot provide the transportation on their behalf, have a vehicle that is large enough to carry</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<p>information to process and file the death certificate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once the funeral home acquires the necessary information for initiating the death certificate, the burial may occur.</li> </ul>	<p>the decedent in the container (e.g. shroud, willow carrier, or bamboo casket). They may rent a vehicle if they do not have a personal vehicle large enough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If wanted, hire any clergy or others for burial services.</li> <li>Help direct any desired services for the burial.</li> <li>Work directly with the funeral home handling the death certificate to complete the necessary information for processing and filing the death certificate. If a funeral home is used to file the death certificate, it is not required to have it fully filed with the State prior to burial. This service will be paid for directly to the funeral home at the time of need.</li> </ul> <p><u>If you are filing the death certificate directly with the state without a funeral home:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition to the steps listed above, the Next of Kin or Designated Agent will file the death certificate with the State Bureau of Vital Record and Statistics <u>within 5 days of death, and prior to burial</u>. NOTE: It can take 3-5 business days for the State to process and return the death certificate to you. This can make it difficult to keep within the 72 hour timeline for a natural burial, so we recommend families who are filing on their own be very proactive in getting the necessary information to the state as soon as possible. If you cannot get the death certificate before 72 hours, you may need to consider calling a funeral home for refrigeration. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They will have to complete a family section of the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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	<p>death certificate with the personal information about the decedent, and they will also have to have the medical portion of the death certificate completed by the decedent's medical provider who was responsible for certifying the death. We highly recommend the Next of Kin or Designated Agent call the Bureau of Vital Record and Statistics prior to the time of need to get paper forms that they can complete as much as they can prior to the time of need.</p> <p><a href="https://www.nmhealth.org/about/erd/bvrhs/vrp/death/">https://www.nmhealth.org/about/erd/bvrhs/vrp/death/</a></p>

**Here are some additional resources that explain home funerals and how to do a home funeral:**

Home Funeral Alliance Home Funeral Guidebook is a free electronic publication that includes everything you need to know about home funerals and how to care for your loved one at home after death.

<https://www.homefuneralalliance.org/home-funeral-guidebook.html>

Instructions for cooling a body up to 72 hours:

<https://peacefulpassageathome.com/cooling-the-body.html>

Frequently asked questions about home funerals:

<https://www.homefuneralalliance.org/faqs.html>

Basic explanations for laws regarding home funerals in New Mexico:

<https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/new-mexico-home-funeral-laws.html>