



### **What is Natural (Green) Burial?**

A green burial is much like a conventional burial, without the detrimental impact on the environment. Fortunately, natural burial is on the rise and offers an alternative to the financially expensive and environmentally costly conventional burial. In 2008, there were only a dozen eco-friendly burial providers. That number has since grown to 300 and shows no sign of slowing. No embalming fluids are allowed, as formaldehyde is toxic. Other embalming fluids that claim to be non-toxic actually just replace one toxic chemical with another. Rather than a casket made of unsustainable wood treated with chemicals, individuals have the option of either a simple burial shroud, or a casket with non-treated wood. The burial site is recorded with GPS coordinates, the surface is restored, and a native plant or stone may commemorate the site.

Funeral and memorial services may be held as customary in one's church, synagogue, mosque, or temple. Families may wish to choose home funerals and memorials or graveside services.

## **What are the concerns and facts about the cost and environmental impact of current practices within the funeral industry?**

The funeral industry is, by and large, a \$20 billion for-profit enterprise, whose environmental impact has been greatly overlooked. The average cost of a funeral in the United States is well over 8,000 dollars. Each year in the United States, 22,500 traditional cemeteries put the following into our soil:

- 827,060 gallons of embalming fluid, including formaldehyde
- 1,636,000 tons of reinforced concrete for vaults
- 90,272 tons of steel for caskets and 14,000 tons of steel for vaults
- 2,700 tons of copper and bronze for caskets
- 30-plus million board feet of hardwoods (including tropical wood) for caskets
- On average, **one cemetery** buries 1,000 gallons of embalming fluid, 97.5 tons of steel, 2,028 tons of concrete, and 56,250 board feet of high quality tropical hardwood in just **one acre**. A typical 10-acre cemetery has enough wood in the form of caskets to construct 40 houses, and there are also concerns about the pollution of groundwater near cemeteries.

*Statistics compiled by Mary Woodsen, Funeral Consumers Alliance, 2016*

## **Is cremation an environmentally sound alternative?**

Unfortunately, each cremation releases between .8 and 5.9 grams of mercury (between 1,000 and 7,800 pounds of mercury each year in the U.S.) as bodies are burned. 75% goes into the air and the rest settles into the ground and water. You could drive about 4,800 miles on the energy equivalent used for one cremation, or a distance to the moon and back 85 times from all U.S. cremations in one year.

The Environmental Protection Agency does not currently regulate crematoriums, and attempts to legislate regulations reducing emissions have successfully been blocked in many states.

## **Who sets the standards for green burial?**

The standards are set and maintained by the national Green Burial Council, which describes itself as “a nonprofit organization working to encourage environmentally sustainable death care and the use of burial as a new means of protecting natural areas.” To ensure continued compliance with these standards, the Green Burial Council continuously assesses the environmental practices of the companies and products that earn eco-certification.

## **Does a natural burial cemetery look the same as a traditional cemetery?**

In a natural burial cemetery, there are no acres of manicured lawns reminiscent of a golf course, but rather vast natural landscapes. Burial sites are recorded with GPS coordinates and the ground is returned to its natural state. Plants and flowers indigenous to the surrounding ecosystem may be planted on the grave, or marked with a flat rock or engraved flat stone. An additional requirement of the Green Burial Council is that 5 percent of the cost of the burial plot be allotted for an endowment to ensure the integrity of the land into the indefinite future, with the intent of protecting the most environmentally vulnerable areas from development or destruction.

## Is there a natural (green) burial cemetery in New Mexico?

Yes! New Mexico now has **La Puerta Natural Burial Ground**, a 40 acre private, serene conservation natural burial site with majestic views, certified by the Green Burial Council. Located at the base of the grand Manzano Mountains, it is one hour's drive south of Albuquerque, and lies adjacent to 14,000 acres of open space, preserved for future generations.

[www.naturalburialnewmexico.com](http://www.naturalburialnewmexico.com)

