

Questions and Answers

About Cremation

A Public Education Brochure from



More and more Americans are choosing cremation over burial in their funeral arrangements. This brochure answers some of the questions you may have about cremation. If you have other questions or need assistance, the staff at Rapp Funeral and Cremation Services is ready to help. Please call 301-565-4100 or email info@rappfuneral.com.

How did cremation become an alternative to burial?

The growing preference for cremation in the modern world actually represents a return to a very old tradition. Cremation probably originated about 5000 years ago in Europe and the Near East. Since then the practice has spread throughout the world, with various religions and cultures developing their own cremation customs. Today the Roman Catholic Church and most other religions permit cremation.

Many people prefer quick reduction of the body rather than a slow breakdown in the ground. By conserving land, cremation also serves the ecology. In addition, cremation gives the family maximum flexibility about when and how to honor the deceased and about the final disposition of the remains.

What occurs during the cremation process?

In one to three hours, the cremation process accomplishes what nature takes several decades to do: return the human form to its elements. A flame reaching 1400 to 1800 degrees Fahrenheit reduces the body (along with any combustible possessions left on or with the body) to bone particles and fragments. The fragments then are processed further to reduce them to uniform particles, with a total weight of 4 to 8 pounds.

For some religious and ethnic groups, being in attendance when the cremation takes place is important. Because it has its own crematory, Rapp can accommodate such requests, whether it is to accompany the body to the crematory, have a ceremony at the crematory, or witness the beginning of the cremation. Because these activities tend to disrupt the crematory schedule, additional charges may apply.

Who does cremations?

Only a licensed mortician or funeral director may arrange for compensation for any disposition of human remains. (While some cremation providers include the word "society" in their names, they are not nonprofit organizations.) He or she will make the necessary arrangements with a state-licensed crematory. Rapp uses its own crematory, Chesapeake Crematory, Inc.

Who can authorize a cremation?

Advance directives given by the deceased before death are legally paramount. Anyone 18 or older may decide whether or not his or her body will be cremated after death. Those wishes should be put in writing and the signature witnessed.

When there is no advance directive, the decision regarding disposition falls to the next of kin. All close relatives should be consulted. The funeral director can help answer any questions.

The responsible parties need to sign the required authorization forms, provided by the funeral director. Cremation may not occur within twelve hours of death in Maryland, or until the deceased has been identified by the next of kin. In addition, the crematory requires that any pacemaker, radioactive device, or battery-powered implant be removed prior to cremation.

If the death occurs in Virginia or the District of Columbia, the medical examiner must give approval before the cremation, and charges a fee for that approval.

Is cremation less expensive?

Yes, cremation is normally the least expensive alternative for disposition of the body (other than donation to a medical school), because the crematory fee is much lower than those charged by cemeteries for burial or entombment. The cost of mortuary services before or after a cremation depends on the choices of the family. If your choice of establishment is Rapp, you may obtain services at prices lower than those of traditional funeral homes.

Do I need a casket for cremation?

No. Many funeral homes and crematories do require the purchase of cremation caskets, also known as alternative containers. Rapp does not have this requirement. You are, of course, free to select such a container. It may be made of corrugated board, fiberboard, softwood (such as pine), or solid hardwood (such as oak, cherry, or mahogany). The funeral director will be happy to review your options with you.

If I choose cremation, can I still have a viewing?

Yes. You may have many viewing options before a cremation, from a brief personal identification by one or two people to a public visitation. Some preparation of the body is advisable (and may be necessary) before a viewing. To hold the body, the family may either purchase a casket or rent one. The rental cost includes the purchase of an interior cremation container.

If you do not want a viewing, you still may have calling hours for the family. Many families also elect to have a funeral service with the body present, often in church, before the cremation.

Does Rapp return all the cremation remains to the survivors?

Yes. Recoverable cremation remains, commonly called "ashes," will be placed in the container of your choice--either the plain temporary container provided by the crematory or a decorative urn. Urns come in

a great variety of materials, styles, and price ranges, from an inexpensive pine cube to an elegant bronze vessel. There are also smaller containers, such as keepsake pendants, that permit either dividing or saving just a portion of cremation remains.

The family is called to pick up the filled container at Rapp at their convenience. Or, for an additional charge, it may be delivered to them or to the final resting place.

Can I be sure these are the ashes of the deceased?

Yes. Whatever the choice of disposition, legal regulations and strict professional ethics ensure that the remains of the deceased are cared for with dignity and respect. All cremations are performed individually. And our crematory uses metal identification tags to preserve a careful chain of custody of the remains.

What should we do with the ashes?

Final disposition of the cremated remains often occurs after a memorial service. If the ashes are to be present at the service, an appropriate container should be selected.

Many choose to bury the ashes in their container in a family cemetery plot. Some cemeteries require an urn vault for burial. The urn also may be placed in a niche within a columbarium, mausoleum, or church. A small engraved plaque may be ordered for the urn, grave, or niche.

Some people want the cremated remains scattered. This may be done in a special cemetery garden, at sea (at least 3 miles from land), or at some other place of special significance. Maryland prohibits scattering on public land, in the Chesapeake Bay or in inland waterways. Don't scatter on private property without the owner's permission. If you choose scattering, you still may wish to designate a place of permanent memorial and mark it with a plaque, a tree planted in remembrance, or some other means.

Some families want to keep the urn somewhere special at home. At Rapp we will be happy to discuss any other alternatives or requests you may have, and if possible arrange to carry out your wishes.

Do you handle pet cremations?

Yes, through our affiliated company, Chesapeake Pet Crematory. Rates are competitive. Pet cremations are done individually, using equipment designed for pets, not the equipment used for humans.

Rapp Funeral and Cremation Services is the Washington area's comprehensive alternative to the traditional funeral home. It offers low-cost cremations and burials, personalized memorials, and personal, professional assistance throughout the grief process.

At Rapp we believe in your right to information, options, and assistance in your time of need. In that spirit this and a variety of other brochures are available free of charge. For more information, call 301-565-4100.

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*The sensible and sensitive alternative
to traditional funeral homes.*

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