

# Green Cemetery FAQs

NATURAL PATH SANCTUARY

Green cemeteries are burial grounds where care of the land is a primary concern. The land is preserved in its natural state forever. Burials are limited in number using only 10-30% of the land. Natural burials occur in harmony with nature without any toxic chemicals. Upon death, the body is allowed to return to the earth entering into the natural cycle of life. There are certain rules and standards that must be practiced in order to be considered a green cemetery, with different levels of certification. Typically green cemeteries do not allow embalming fluids or cement vaults. Containers are made from unfinished and non-precious woods, and no metal is allowed. Full body burials are encouraged as this is less harmful to the environment than cremation, but both methods are acceptable. Full body burial in a biodegradable covering/shroud/blanket, has the least environmental impact and is the choice encouraged at the Natural Path Sanctuary green cemetery.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Natural Burial

### 1) What is a natural burial? (also referred to as a “green burial” or “conservation burial”)

This is how everyone was buried throughout most of human history. Modern burial techniques with steel or bronze coffins and concrete vaults are actually quite modern. Aside from the Egyptian pharaohs, embalming only became common around the time of the Civil War.

In a natural burial, a person is laid to rest wrapped in a shroud or in a biodegradable container such as a natural wooden casket, or even cardboard box. They are not embalmed. (B)

### 2) What's wrong with embalming?

Embalming fluid is primarily comprised of the carcinogenic chemical formaldehyde, which has been proven to pose health risks in funeral homes. A study by the National Cancer Institute released in late 2009 revealed that funeral directors have a much higher incidence of myeloid leukemia. The sanitation and preservation of a corpse can almost always take place without the use of chemicals, as is done in just about every nation in the world – with the exception of the US, Canada, and a half-dozen other countries. (A)

### 3) Doesn't embalming prevent disease?

Infected bodies can remain a potential source of infection for a short time after death whether embalmed or not, but as is the case with infected live patients, transmission requires direct contact with infectious tissue or body fluids, which requires usual safe handling steps with or without embalming. Pathogens (with a few rare exceptions) depend upon living tissues. They are parasites. When the body dies, the pathogens die as well. The soil flora can deal with these pathogens. Contrary to popular belief, embalming is not required by law. (D)

### 4) Does cremation create a lot of pollution?

Cremation uses far fewer resources than typical disposition options, but it certainly has an environmental impact. Cremation burns fossil fuels, and some older cremation facilities can use significantly more energy compared to newer ones. Mercury is also emitted when a person with dental amalgam fillings is cremated. (A)

### 5) Will animals disturb the body?

No, the body is buried 3-4 feet deep, depending on the soil composition at the cemetery. This depth ensures that remains are both undisturbed and return quickly to nature.

### 6) How is a natural/green/conservation cemetery maintained?

Most state laws require that a percentage of a burial plot's sales price goes into a permanent endowment for the care of the space. (Wisconsin requires 15%) The endowment is used to maintain the land. A natural cemetery requires very little maintenance compared to a lawn-type or conventional cemetery, avoiding use of fossil fuels and carbon dioxide emissions that occur with frequent lawn mowing. Concrete vaults are not used in a natural burial which are only useful for maintaining a level surface so that it can be easily mowed. In comparison, in a natural burial ground the vegetation is allowed to grow naturally. Some green cemeteries implement land management procedures, reforesting land or restoring prairie. Care is taken to nurture indigenous growth only. (C)

**Sources:** A. Green Burial Council; B. Foxfield Preserve at The Nature Center; C. Trust for Natural Legacies; D. Pan American Health Organization.