

Cost

When examining costs, especially for services sold as a package, know exactly what services and materials are included in the quoted price and what are considered “add-ons” incurring an additional cost. Transportation of the body, materials from which the casket (or urn) are made, and a public viewing of the body are just a few of the factors that can affect the price.

Environmental impact

Full body burial has a high impact on the environment depending on whether the body is embalmed, the type of casket, and the need for a grave liner. A green burial, in which the body is not embalmed and is placed in a biodegradable container directly in the ground without a grave liner is more environmentally friendly. A list of cemeteries allowing green burials in Washington is available at <https://www.nhfuneral.org/green-burial-cemeteries-in-the-us-and-canada.html>.



Image by [Anastasia Makarevich](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Cremation also has a high impact on the environment as it uses a significant amount of natural gas and electricity and produces greenhouse gases and toxic emissions.

Both terramation and aquamation are considered environmentally friendly. They are carbon neutral, use less energy than cremation, and produce no toxic emissions. Aquamation, however, uses about 300 gallons of water.

Final Words

Failing to plan for your body after you die can leave the decision to others who are grief stricken by your death and unsure how to honor your wishes. If you feel strongly about the disposition of your body, make your desires known. Record your wishes in a “letter of intent” or standardized “disposition of body” form that allows you to specify the means you desire and an authorized agent to carry out your instructions. Sign and date the form in the presence of a witness and share the document with your authorized agent and family members.

You can also work directly with a funeral home or service provider during end-of-life planning. Pre-arranging and paying for body disposition before death (e.g., a pre-paid funeral plan) is considered designation of authority in Washington state.



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Body Disposition Options



When you die, it may be the end of your journey through this world, but your body is left behind. This “earthen vessel,” like a clay pot, is subject to decay. As a result, disposition of your remains becomes an urgent matter.

Body disposition options currently available in Washington state include full body burial, cremation, terramation, aquamation, and full body donation. All but the latter are described in this brochure.



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Burial

Burial refers to placing a body in the ground or a crypt and marking the location with a memorial (e.g., monument, headstone or plaque). Burial is an ancient means of body disposition with the oldest known grave dating back almost 80,000 years.

Because you cannot be buried on private property in Washington, a burial requires a cemetery plot or crypt. Most cemeteries require the body to be placed in a casket; most also require an outer burial container (vault or grave liner) to keep the grave from collapsing. Embalming, with a few exceptions, is not required by law; it is recommended if public viewing is desired more than a couple of days after death.

Cremation

Cremation is the process of reducing a body to bone and ash by burning. It has been practiced since prehistoric times, especially among certain cultures and religions, and in times of war. Cremation is the most popular form of body disposition in Washington.

Before a body is cremated, pacemakers and other medical devices are removed because they can explode and/or produce toxins. The body is then placed in a burnable container ranging from a corrugated cardboard box to a wooden casket. The body and container are heated to 1,600 to 2,100 degrees in an industrial furnace that holds one body at a time.

The process takes 2 to 3 hours on average. The remains, primarily bone fragments, are passed through a magnetic field to remove metal. The bone is reduced to a coarse powder and returned to the next of kin.

Terramation

Terramation (also known as natural organic reduction, human composting, or body composting) is the process of transforming human remains into soil. Washington was the first state in the nation to legalize the process.

Terramation is undertaken in a single-body vessel and uses naturally occurring microbes, organic materials (such as sawdust or woodchips), heat, and moisture to accelerate decomposition of soft tissues. Heat generated by the process kills most harmful microbes.

Bone, implants, and pacemakers are minimally affected by the process. The bone is reduced to a coarse powder and reintroduced into the soil. Implants and pacemakers are recycled or discarded.

Terramation takes 6 to 10 weeks and results in 0.5 to 1.5 cubic yards of soil. All or a portion of the soil is returned to the next of kin or donated to a land conservation site.

Aquamation

Aquamation (also known as alkaline hydrolysis) is a process that reduces a body to sterile liquid and bone using water, heat, and alkali. The process has been used to dispose of animal carcasses for over a century but was first legalized for the disposition of human remains in 2003. The process was legalized in Washington in 2020.

Aquamation is undertaken in a single-body vessel that is placed under pressure to prevent boiling. Soft tissues are quickly reduced to simple molecules such as amino acids, sugars, fatty acids, and water. Bone, implants, and pacemakers are minimally affected by the process. The bone is reduced to a

coarse powder and returned to the next of kin. Implants and pacemakers are recycled or discarded.

How do you choose?

Choosing a means of body disposition can be difficult. The following factors are likely to influence your decision: religious beliefs, location at time of death (and services available in that location), cost, and environmental concerns.

Religious beliefs

Burial and cremation are commonly used among Christians, although practices vary by denomination. The Catholic Church did not approve of cremation as a means of body disposition until 1963 and still prohibits the scattering of ashes; it has actively campaigned against laws legalizing terramation and aquamation.

In Judaism, burial is the preferred method of body disposition; some non-orthodox Jewish communities, however, permit cremation.

Hinduism and Buddhism consider cremation an essential part of one's spiritual journey. Islam does not allow embalming or cremation; the body is always buried.

Availability

Burial and cremation are readily available in Clallam County. To obtain terramation and aquamation services, family members or a local mortuary must work with facilities in the Seattle area and the body must be transported to those facilities. Transportation of the body will increase the total cost of the service and negative impact on the environment. It can also complicate funeral arrangements and the conduct of memorial services.