



AUSTRALASIAN
CEMETERIES & CREMATORIA
ASSOCIATION

GUIDELINES FOR NATURAL BURIAL

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GLOSSARY

Conventional (Standard) Burial is defined as any regular burial of a body or interment or scattering of ash that does not necessarily conform or take account of the usual or ordinary course of nature.

Natural burial is defined as the interment of a body that conforms to the usual or ordinary course of nature and adds to the biodiversity of the area. This definition includes the terms Green Burials, Woodland Burials and Bushland Burials.

Ecological burial is defined as the disposal of the deceased, either as the burial of a body or as cremation and dispersal of ashes, that mitigates any negative impact of the process of burial and cremation (or any other disposal process) on the environment.

Natural Burial Ground is an area in a cemetery or other location, fulfilling an environmental and public amenity purpose, set aside solely for natural burial.

Environmental Impact

In a study undertaken for Centennial Park Cemetery Authority (1) by GHD Consultants Pty Ltd 2007 (2) the assessment of the environmental impact of disposal of the dead can be defined as being measured in two ways. These are:

1. Environmental Impact Risk Assessment

Based on four key environmental factors:

1. Resource consumption (casket and land)
2. Air emissions
3. Soil and ground water contamination
4. Waste disposal

2. Greenhouse Gas Assessment – a calculation of the levels of greenhouse gas emissions generated for each **process**. A carbon footprint calculation can then be established based on fuel usage figures for each process. The assumption in these calculations is only equipment **directly** involved in each process is included. No calculation for memorial production is made.

Evaluation of emissions relating to burials can be calculated on the inclusion of:

- a. Grave excavation
- b. Soil removal
- c. Back filling of grave
- d. Construction of cemetery beam

Evaluation of emissions relating to cremation is based on the inclusion of:

- a. Gas Consumption
- b. Cremulation process
- c. Interment of ashes:
 - i. Grave excavation
 - ii. Soil removal
 - iii. Back filling
 - iv. Construction of concrete beam / berm

To calculate an accurate reflection of the environmental impact risk and green house gas emissions of an organisation, it is necessary for each cemetery to have its processes assessed separately due to the individual nature of the burial and cremation processes and equipment used by each organisation.

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Sustainability is the resolution of the conflict between the competing goals that drive the pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and preservation, social and political equity and the additional strategy of cultural diversity and responsiveness.

Geographical Information System (GIS) is an electronic information system capable of integrating, storing, editing, analysing, sharing, and displaying geographically referenced information.

Global Positioning System (GPS) uses a constellation of between 24 and 32 Medium Earth Orbit satellites that transmit precise microwave signals that enable GPS receivers to determine their current location, the time, and their velocity (including direction). GPS is a standard tool used for land survey.

Durable lasting for a long time, especially without sustaining damage or wear

GUIDELINES FOR NATURAL BURIAL STRATEGY

Level 1	Develop a formal Environmental Management Strategy.
	Identify and understand the (complex) environmental issues.
	PEST & SWOT analysis
	Identify organisational environmental strategy plan and link to this
	Develop and Complete an Environmental Management Strategy Plan for cemetery
	Adopt, Review
	Greening of Conventional burials
	Assessment of operation for practises that can be “greener” (with minimal resource requirement)
	Stakeholder consultation where applicable
	Establish policy and protocols for operational practices that “green” the business.
	Communicate, train, educate and market
	Measure, monitor and review
	Natural Burial Cemetery Development
	Stakeholder consultation
	Develop policy and protocols for natural burial grounds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles and objectives • Goals • Conditions for natural burials • Legal requirements • Adoption of policy & procedure • Implementation of policy & procedure • Review of policy
	Identifying land for natural burials. Consider alliance organisations such as conservation and levels of commitment to sustainability i.e. stand alone conservation objectives.
	Procurement of site
	Formal planning and preparation of site <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape plan • Site preparation • Plot location • Site maintenance • Memorialisation options
	Set fees and charges
	Communicate, train, educate and market
	Measure, monitor and review
Level 2	Implementation of Environmental Management Plan to improve sustainable environmental performance of business (include natural burial strategy).
	Develop Policy and Protocols for operational implementation to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste management / maximize recycling and green waste use • Optimal energy use • Optimise water use, collection and conservation • Environmental building practices • Decrease fossil fuel use • Education and Marketing
	Communicate, train, educate and market
	Measure, monitor and review
Level 3	Calculation of environmental impact risk, greenhouse gas emissions and operations.
	Measure the environmental impact risk and greenhouse gas emissions of operations using the GHD model. Assess <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burials • Cremations • Cremation + Ash Interment Assessment
	Develop a policy and protocol to mitigate risk impact and offset carbon emissions.
	Communicate, train, educate and market
	Measure, monitor and review

GUIDELINES FOR NATURAL BURIAL

1. Principles and Objectives

The objective of natural burial is to facilitate the burial of a body in a manner that conforms to the usual or ordinary course of nature and adds to the biodiversity of the area and environment.

At all times the materials and processes used to contain, transport and inter a body for natural burial must maintain the principles of dignity and respect; for the deceased in their desire for a natural burial for all persons in attendance.

2. Goals

2.1 To provide people with a choice of an alternative burial type.

The cemetery shall provide an area of land set aside for the purpose of natural burial. The cemetery may undertake to precede this provision by educating the public and commencing with “greening” its conventional burial practices. The Conditions for Natural Burials in Part 3 of these guidelines may be used as a reference for this undertaking.

2.2 To reduce the impact of conventional burial and cremations on the environment.

To support this objective no embalming of the body will be permitted and only biodegradable receptacles and contents of receptacles will be permitted. Burial sites may be planted with indigenous flora. Burial shall be at a minimum depth, based on governing legislation and in a layer of soil high in organic matter to facilitate more rapid natural decomposition.

2.3 To maintain or enhance the quality of the natural environment.

Plots may be laid out in a similar way as a conventional cemetery. Flora may be grown around the plot to create a green or natural setting that will provide a haven for fauna in the future.

2.4 To achieve rapid and real return of the body to the earth.

Natural burial is defined as burial that conforms to the ordinary course of nature. The aim is to return the body to the soil as quickly as would naturally occur. The absence of embalming and the addition of organically rich soil to fill the plot may assist this process.

2.5 To provide a sustainable alternative to conventional burial.

Natural burial aims to lower the environmental impact risk and carbon footprint of burial, in the reduction of use of fossil fuels. Marginal land may be used, as grave sites do not need to be on flat or gentle gradients and can be placed in a more informal layout to use up available space should the contour of the land dictate.

2.6 To ensure low ongoing sustainable maintenance requirements

Less maintenance will be carried out in a natural burial area due to the reduced need for landscaping, plot manicuring, headstone upkeep and memorabilia management. Natural cemeteries do not require regular mowing and only require minimal upkeep such as initial watering and control of fauna.

3. Conditions for Natural Burials

3.1 Natural burials must comply with all legislative and regulatory requirements.

3.2 The cemetery must be contacted and normal booking procedure followed prior to any burial taking place. This is a normal requirement for all burials and takes into account other funerals happening in the cemetery.

3.3 A cemetery plan for natural burial grave/plot locations will be available from the cemetery management.

3.4 Burial Documentation

This will be provided by the funeral director, or person responsible for the funeral, prior to the interment.

3.5 Cemetery fees and payment

Fees will be invoiced and paid for according to the incumbent policies of the organisation.

3.6 Conditions of burial plot sales

3.6.1 Material that **can** be used.

- o Caskets made of sustainably grown timber, or
- o Wicker or willow caskets or shrouds made of natural fibres (legislation permitting)
- o Casket fittings and contents shall be made of sustainable natural biodegradable materials only. Name plate should be of a durable material.

3.6.2 Material that **cannot** be used.

Non-biodegradable material inside or outside the casket, including:

- o Any types of plastic or metal fittings (exclusive of nails and screws),
- o PVC, glass, ceramic, metal, treated varnished timber, toxic glues or plastic sheeting inside the casket.

3.7 Acceptable shrouds – Local legislation permitting

- o Shrouds made of natural materials such as silk, cotton or wool, with a solid base are acceptable. The solid base assists with the lowering into the ground and can be made of sustainable natural timber and contained within the shroud.
- o Contents of shrouds must be fastened to a solid base to prevent movement to one side.
- o Shrouds without a solid base are acceptable if used in conjunction with a suitable industry recognised transport and lowering system.
- o Shroud preparation and burial procedures involving shrouds must comply with all local rules and regulations of the day.

3.8 Unacceptable casket or shroud with

- o Cardboard, PVC or synthetic coverings.
- o varnish and plastic or metal fittings.
- o leaking fluids.
- o Caskets having obnoxious smells.

3.9 Acceptable clothing and casket items

- o The deceased should be dressed in natural fibre clothing or wrapped in a shroud, with no undue additional synthetic substances.

3.10 Chemicals

- o No embalming fluids are permitted. The body may be sanitised.

3.11 Natural Burial location

- o Natural burials pertaining to this policy may be in areas of the cemetery set aside specifically for the purpose of natural burials.
- o The conditions of burial laid out in this policy may provide a guideline for the “greening” of conventional burials.
- o All plots will be allocated by the cemetery administration.
- o Plot location may be recorded using GPS / GIS technology or other accurate recording system.
- o Plots may be reserved either allocated on a next available or beside next-of kin according to the practice of the individual cemetery.
- o Second interments may be permitted.
- o Due to Health and Safety Regulations, the digging of graves will only be undertaken by cemetery staff.
- o Bodies will be buried according to local minimum cover regulations.

3.12 Family can assist with the back filling of a grave according to cemetery regulations and policy.

3.13 Families will be made aware of memorial restrictions

Supporting a sustainable landscape planting plan is the principle goal.

- o Indigenous flora may be planted in lieu of a headstone or any other memorial thereby attracting indigenous fauna.
- o The cost and maintenance of the area is included in the plot purchase price.
- o The cemetery shall be responsible for managing the natural burial site.
- o Indigenous flora will be planted only in seasons and at times that maximise establishment and long term survival.
- o No memorials, ornamentation or additional planting will be allowed on burial plots other than that prescribed for the site.
- o The cemetery staff will manage maintenance and re-grassing of burial plots to avoid soil erosion and ensure consistency of management.
- o The planting of the site will be in accordance with the site landscape plan

4. Legal Requirements

The Natural Burial Policy will comply with all state, local and cemetery regulations

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5. Adoption of Policy

The Natural Burials Policy was adopted by on of 20., and at the appropriate time the will set the fees and charges for natural burials.

6. Implementation of Policy

The Natural Burial Policy will be implemented on the location, establishment and operating of a Natural Burial cemetery.

7. Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed with any changes to central government and local government legislation but no less than every two years.