

The agent must:

- Locate a willing crematory operator or cemetery to work with.
- Read guidelines and rules.
- Find or make the burial or cremation box and decorate if desired. (See Resources on pack page for more information.)
- Make sure hospice, hospital, nursing home, or all people at home know that this will be a home-directed funeral, so no one has the body picked up by a funeral home.
- If the death is unexpected, the medical examiner must be notified and perhaps an autopsy will be needed.
- Make sure the coroner knows that someone in the family is acting as funeral director and to call that person when the body can be released.
- Arrange transportation: use someone's van, pickup truck, or SUV. You may need two or more people to carry the body and container. Handles or cut-outs make it easier to move.
- Arrange to pick up ashes after the cremation to scatter or inter.

Preservation and Care

Wash the body with warm water and soap; clean and trim nails; shampoo and arrange the hair; close eyes and mouth; use cosmetics if desired; some liquid might come through orifices after death and pads may be necessary.

Massaging with oil is an option. Dress the body or wrap in a shroud.

Decide whether you want some lining and pillow in the container; arrange body, paying attention to hair, face, and hands. Use dry ice to keep the body fresh for several days.

For cremation, make sure all contents of box are combustible. Pacemakers must be removed because batteries would explode and damage the retort, but you can leave the artificial joints and other surgery miscellany.

Who We Are

About Us

The Bay Area Funeral Consumer Association provides families with non-biased, reliable information for end-of-life planning.

We are a compassionate and knowledgeable staff to help you and your loved ones prepare ahead.

Contact Us

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Family-Directed Home Funerals

*"Our Family Takes Care
of Its Own"*



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Home Funerals – A Revived Tradition

Before funeral homes there were “undertakers” in 19th century America. Undertakers were carpenters or furniture store owners, who undertook the side business of building caskets. Before that, each family took care of its own deaths, with the menfolk making coffins and the women washing and laying out the deceased in the parlor where friends and neighbors would come to pay their respects. It is still done this way in most of the world outside North America.

Now there is a growing attempt to return to the tradition of home funerals. Home funerals and family care of bodies is perfectly legal in California. Embalming is not required, nor does it take a licensed mortician to transport a body. Most cemeteries do not require a casket, which would go against the religious tenets of Moslems and Jews who often bury bodies in direct contact with the earth and without embalming.

The Department of Consumer Affairs, Funeral and Cemetery Bureau publishes a booklet, the *“California Guide for Funeral and Cemetery Purchases.”* The guide states: “The law does not prohibit consumers from preparing their own dead for disposition. If you choose to do this you must file with the local registrar a properly completed Certificate of Death, signed by the attending physician or coroner and obtain a Permit for Disposition before any disposition can occur. You must also provide a casket or suitable container and make

Arrangements directly with the cemetery or crematory.”

Who Will Opt for Home Funerals?

Not everyone will want to do a home funeral. The ones who do are:

- People who are more independent and don't need a lot of support.
- People who realize that death is a natural part of life and are more curious than afraid of death.
- Those who value the personalization possible by the after-death care of a loved one.
- Families acting upon the request of a loved one who wants to die at home, preparing for their final exit amidst people they trust, rather than with strangers.
- Families who want to retain control and avoid the commercialization and impersonality of funeral homes.
- They have heard that being physically involved helps in grieving process, giving closure.
- They will probably save money (no embalming, expensive casket, or use of middle-man services).

Home Funerals and Memorials Can Be More Personal

- The rites can be as religious or secular as wanted. Use scented candles, incense, poetry, music, flowers, greenery, readings, speakers, flags, videos, photos, and/or mementos.
- The vigil or visitation can occur at the hours or days desired, be simple or elaborate to fit the personality of the deceased.

- Invite and involve the people you want, who knew and loved the deceased
- Make and/or decorate the casket as you wish, inside and outside. Put personal belongings or notes in the casket if desired. You may also opt for a shroud or blanket for the body.
- Dry ice will be used for preservation, rather than embalming.
- Sometimes the family wants to dig the grave themselves. Consult the cemetery administration as to exact location, width, and depth and whether a liner is required. An autopsy will be needed. Make sure the coroner knows that someone in the family is acting as funeral director and to call that person when the body can be released.

Planning Helps

The family can agree ahead of time who is to direct things and who will do which tasks. Lacking a family, the dying person can choose an agent under an Advance Health Care Directive to take charge of disposition.

The dying person can write or dictate his after-death wishes (a Funeral Consumer Alliance planning form or the “Before I Go, You Should Know” booklet would be fine) and arrange for a “Payable Upon Death” bank trust account naming the agent as the person to receive the money to cover last expenses.