
Professional Certificate in Mortuary Science

Cremation Procedures

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Cremation is the process of reducing a deceased body to its basic elements through the application of intense heat. This practice has become increasingly popular as an alternative to traditional burial methods for a variety of reasons, including cost, environmental concerns, and personal preferences.

Key Terms and Vocabulary

1. **Crematory:** A facility equipped for the cremation of human remains. Crematories are typically regulated by state laws and must meet certain standards for equipment, procedures, and record-keeping.
2. **Cremation chamber:** The primary piece of equipment used in the cremation process. It is a specially designed furnace that reaches temperatures of up to 1800 degrees Fahrenheit to reduce the body to bone fragments.
3. **Cremation container:** The container in which the body is placed for cremation. This can be a traditional casket, an alternative container made of combustible materials, or a rental casket designed for cremation.
4. **Cremains:** The term used to describe the remains of a body after cremation. Cremains consist of bone fragments that are processed into a fine powder and returned to the family in an urn or other container.
5. **Incinerator:** Another term for the cremation chamber. The intense heat of the incinerator is essential for breaking down the body into its basic elements.
6. **Identification process:** The procedure by which the identity of the deceased is verified before cremation. This typically involves the use of a unique identifier, such as a metal disc or tag, that remains with the body throughout the process.
7. **Refractory bricks:** The fire-resistant bricks that line the interior of the cremation chamber. These bricks help to retain heat and protect the chamber from damage during the cremation process.
8. **Scattering:** The act of dispersing cremated remains in a meaningful or symbolic location. Scattering can be done on land, in water, or even in the air (via airplane).
9. **Urn:** A container used to hold cremated remains. Urns come in a variety of materials, sizes, and designs, allowing families to choose one that reflects their personal preferences.
10. **Witnessed cremation:** A cremation procedure in which family members or loved ones are present to witness the cremation process. This can provide closure and a sense of peace for those who choose to participate.

Pre-Cremation Procedures

Before the actual cremation process begins, several important steps must be taken to prepare the body and ensure that the cremation proceeds smoothly.

1. Identification: The first step in the cremation process is to verify the identity of the deceased. This is typically done using a unique identifier, such as a metal disc or tag, that remains with the body throughout the process.
2. Authorization: Before cremation can take place, the next of kin or authorized representative must sign a cremation authorization form. This document gives permission for the cremation to proceed and outlines the specific details of the cremation process.
3. Preparation of the body: The body is typically prepared for cremation by removing any jewelry, medical devices, or other items that are not suitable for cremation. The body may also be dressed in appropriate clothing or placed in a cremation container.
4. Casket selection: If a traditional casket is being used for the cremation, the family may choose a casket that reflects their preferences and budget. Alternatively, an alternative container or rental casket may be used for the cremation.
5. Final viewing: Some families may choose to have a final viewing of the body before cremation. This can provide closure and an opportunity for loved ones to say goodbye.
6. Transportation to the crematory: Once the body is prepared and all necessary paperwork is completed, the body is transported to the crematory for the cremation process to begin.

The Cremation Process

The cremation process itself involves several distinct steps that ensure the body is properly processed and the remains are handled with care and respect.

1. Charging the chamber: The body is placed in the cremation chamber, either in a casket or an alternative container. The chamber is then heated to temperatures of up to 1800 degrees Fahrenheit to begin the cremation process.
2. Reduction process: As the body is exposed to the intense heat of the cremation chamber, it undergoes a reduction process that breaks it down into bone fragments. This process typically takes several hours to complete.
3. Cooling and processing: Once the cremation process is finished, the bone fragments are allowed to cool before being processed into a fine powder. This powder, known as cremains, is what is returned to the family in an urn or other container.
4. Separation process: After cooling, the bone fragments are carefully separated from any metal or other non-organic materials that may have been present in the cremation chamber. These materials are then disposed of appropriately.
5. Pulverization: The final step in the cremation process involves pulverizing the bone fragments into a fine

powder. This ensures that the cremains are uniform in texture and can be easily placed in an urn or scattered as desired.

6. Final inspection: Before the cremains are returned to the family, a final inspection is conducted to ensure that the remains are properly processed and ready for dispersal or interment.

Post-Cremation Procedures

After the cremation process is complete, there are several important steps that must be taken to ensure that the cremains are handled and dispersed appropriately.

1. Return of cremains: Once the cremains have been processed and inspected, they are placed in an urn or other container for return to the family. The family may then choose to scatter the cremains, bury them, or keep them in a memorial location.
2. Scattering: If the family chooses to scatter the cremains, they must do so in a location that is meaningful or significant to the deceased. This can be done on private property with permission or in a designated scattering garden.
3. Burial: Some families may choose to bury the cremains in a cemetery or other memorial location. This can be done in a traditional grave plot or in a cremation niche or columbarium.
4. Memorialization: Families may choose to memorialize their loved ones in a variety of ways, including through the creation of a memorial plaque or marker, a dedicated garden, or a virtual memorial website.
5. Legal requirements: It is important to be aware of any legal requirements or regulations regarding the handling and disposal of cremains. Some states have specific laws governing the scattering or burial of cremated remains.
6. Follow-up care: After the cremation process is complete, funeral homes or crematories may offer follow-up care services to assist families with memorialization, grief support, or other needs.

Challenges and Considerations

While cremation is a common and accepted practice, there are several challenges and considerations to keep in mind when choosing cremation as a final disposition method.

1. Religious and cultural considerations: Some religions and cultures have specific beliefs or traditions regarding cremation that may influence a family's decision. It is important to respect these beliefs and ensure that the chosen method of disposition aligns with the deceased's wishes.
2. Environmental impact: While cremation is often seen as a more environmentally friendly option than traditional burial, it does have some environmental impact. The burning of fossil fuels and emissions from the cremation process can contribute to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Cost considerations: Cremation can be a more cost-effective option than traditional burial, but there are still costs associated with the process, including crematory fees, urns, and memorialization. Families should

carefully consider their budget and options before choosing cremation.

4. Emotional considerations: Some individuals may find the idea of cremation unsettling or distressing. It is important to have open and honest conversations with family members and loved ones about their wishes and preferences regarding final disposition.

5. Legal considerations: Each state has its own laws and regulations governing the cremation process, including requirements for authorization, handling of remains, and record-keeping. It is important to be aware of these laws and ensure that the cremation is conducted in compliance with state regulations.

6. Storage and memorialization: Families must decide how they wish to store or display the cremains after the cremation process is complete. This may involve choosing an urn, selecting a burial site, or creating a memorial tribute in honor of the deceased.

Conclusion

Cremation procedures are a common and accepted method of final disposition for many individuals and families. Understanding the key terms and vocabulary associated with cremation, as well as the pre-cremation, cremation, and post-cremation procedures, is essential for funeral professionals and others involved in the end-of-life industry. By being knowledgeable about the cremation process and the challenges and considerations that come with it, funeral professionals can better serve their clients and provide compassionate and respectful care during a difficult time.