



Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Massachusetts

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The Cremation Option in Western Massachusetts

Cremation is an increasingly common choice for the final disposition of human remains. The reasons people choose it vary as much as the individuals involved, but often include personal preferences:

- for quick reduction of their mortal remains to “ash” rather than slow decomposition of the body in the ground;
- that family and friends focus not on their death or on the presence of their lifeless corpse at a wake or funeral but, rather, on their life through memories shared at a memorial service. Freed from requiring the presence of a body, the memorial service can be scheduled for more convenient time(s) and place(s) so that more people may be able to attend;
- for a more personally satisfying “final resting place” made possible by remains that may be scattered in a place (or places) enjoyed during life, or kept in an urn close to family;
- that less of our limited open space be devoted to cemeteries; and/or
- that large amounts of money not be spent on costly death-related expenses when it might be better used to meet the needs of living family or to support worthy causes.

NOTE: Cremated remains are not really ashes. The term “**ash**” is used only for convenience. Cremated remains consist of bone burned at high heat and then pulverized into particulate matter of varying degrees of fineness. The term “cremains” is sometimes used.

Western Massachusetts crematories (listed on next page) are located within cemeteries, and normally require that the consumer make arrangements through a funeral home that will (minimally) pick up the body, complete the necessary paperwork, and arrange for transport of the body to the crematory. Consumers are not legally required, however, to hire a funeral director. Next of kin or a designated friend may carry out a decedent's wishes, provided that the paperwork is in order (see below).

Massachusetts funeral homes are not allowed to run crematories. Some funeral homes have the word “cremation” in their names, but they do not in fact cremate bodies; they contract with a crematory for that service. All funeral homes that list any cremation services are required by the Federal Trade Commission to offer the option of “**direct cremation**” (without “extras” such as embalming, an elaborate casket or a funeral service). This is the least expensive option. Consumers who wish the funeral home to provide additional services, such as calling hours or a funeral service, will pay more.

When comparing the cost of “direct cremation” on the General Price Lists from different funeral homes, consumers should be sure to find out whether or not the funeral home's stated price includes:

- the fee of the **medical examiner** who must view the body before it can be cremated and issue a **cremation permit** (now \$100 in Massachusetts); and
- the fee of the **crematory** for performing the actual cremation (varies, depending on crematory and circumstances; often in the range of \$250 to \$375 for an adult).

Massachusetts law requires a 48-hour waiting period prior to cremation unless the death was due to a contagious or infectious disease. The law requires a death certificate, a burial/disposition permit, and a cremation permit. The crematory typically requires authorization by next of kin or other appropriate person. Where there is an estranged or separated spouse, or there are next-of-kin opponents to cremation, it is important for the decedent to have appointed an agent in advance in writing.

Whether or not the necessary arrangements for cremation are made through a chosen funeral home, the consumer may benefit by contacting the crematory directly (and even visiting in person) to understand what is involved in cremation; to learn what options are available for observing the cremation, for having a service on site, or for storing, burying or scattering the remains; and to discuss any associated charges.

Unless other arrangements have been made, the cremated remains are returned to the family. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health imposes no restriction as to the disposition of ashes. You may keep them, bury them, or scatter them anywhere—subject to the usual laws prohibiting trespass on private property without permission, or on public property that might forbid this activity.

Massachusetts law does NOT require:

- embalming (a much smaller charge is permitted for washing and related procedures);
- a casket (instead, a considerably less expensive “alternative container,” often made of sturdy cardboard, fiberboard and/or pressed wood, is commonly used); or
- an urn (instead, a simple plastic or cardboard “temporary container” is often used, particularly if the remains are to be scattered).

NOTE: A particular funeral home may require embalming if the consumer chooses to have the funeral home arrange a viewing of the body. However, a funeral home should not require embalming simply to comply with the state law mandating a 48-hour waiting period before a body is cremated. Similarly, a particular cemetery may require something more durable than the basic plastic or cardboard container if the consumer chooses to have the remains buried there.

Contact Information for Crematories

Hillcrest Park Cemetery & Crematory, 895 Parker Street, Springfield, MA 01129 (413) 782-2311
www.hillcrestparkcemetery.com

Springfield Cemetery & Crematory, 171 Maple Street, Springfield, MA 01105 (413) 732-0712
www.springfieldcemetery.com/

Pittsfield Cemetery & Crematory, 203 Wahconah Street, Pittsfield, MA 01201 (413) 447-7953

All Faiths Cemetery & Crematory, 7 Island Road, Worcester, MA 01603 (508) 753-8842 www.allfaithscem.org/

Rural Cemetery & Crematory, 180 Grove Street, Worcester, MA 01605 (508) 754-1313

Note: There are two Boston-area companies that serve all of Massachusetts, and post their prices clearly online:

- www.casperfuneralservices.com/cremation-service
- bostoncremation.org/cremation

They are funeral homes, not crematories, but they include the cost of the crematory in their simple packages, easy for families to understand. It is worth comparing these offers to the prices charged by local funeral homes.

Additional Resources

Our website, www.FuneralConsumersWMass.org, provides links to many relevant documents from the Federal Trade Commission, the Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health, and the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Embalmers and Funeral Directors, among others.

Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death, by Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson (Hinesburg, Vt.: Upper Access Books, 2011).