

INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY

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Theme:

Summary

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Incorporated

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21 November 2005

The Director, Standing Committee on Social Issues,
Legislative Council, Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney, 2000

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Dear Sir/Madam

INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY

We understand the Committee is due to make its final report and submit the following for its consideration:

From the outset it appears the motivation for this inquiry has come from the funeral industry. There is no history of significant or persistent complaints from consumers excepting those relating to cost and overservice. For no apparent reason the industry is pressing for regulation. This is enough for any consumer to be alarmed, for regulation will not address the concern of cost and overservice but only aggravate that concern.

Already the industry is dominated by a few major players and there are other legal avenues available, such as trade practices laws, etc, which can be used to encourage fair trading.

This Committee is in a unique position to deliver an outcome which will enable consumers to be informed and provide options rather than tighten what is already an effective monopoly.

This Committee is also in a position to guide the funeral industry to a more environmentally friendly and sustainable future by encouraging the use of cardboard coffins. From a cursory review of what has happened in England it appears that chipboard is not a preferred material and that crematoriums no longer reject cardboard coffins (Ecopod - UK). Another website search of "Cardboard Coffins" reveals a source of coffins which have been tested and satisfies environmental concerns.

LawConsumers is now in the final stages of the development of a do it yourself funeral kit. This kit has two essential functions - firstly it provides information and, secondly, for the small minority to proceed to arrange a funeral without a funeral director. It is clear from the research done to date there may be a need to ensure government policy on some health issues, local government policy in respect of cemeteries and crematorium operational policies do not unnecessarily impede the opportunity for a do it yourself funeral including the use of a cardboard coffin as is presently possible.

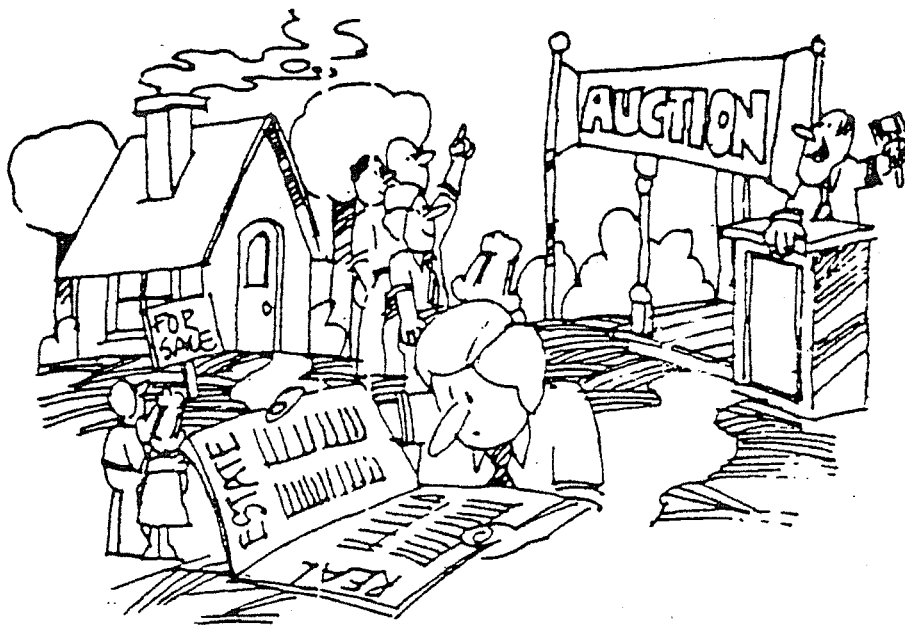
The Committee must ensure, whatever its verdict is, that consumers retain a right to a 'no frills' and low cost funeral service and not eliminate the opportunity for consumers to do it themselves. It must also be recognised that not all consumers can afford \$5,000 or a long period of debt repayment in circumstances where there appears to be no alternative.

A copy of the draft kit is enclosed.

It would be interesting to know if the Committee has tested any of the assertions of Mr Wayne Howell in Submission No 26.

Yours faithfully
LAWCONSUMERS Incorporated

Max Burgess



A DRAFT FUNERAL KIT

REFERENCE MANUAL

*NB: DRAFT ONLY
SUBJECT TO CHANGE*



LAW CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION

VISIT OUR WEBSITE www.lawconsumers.org

THE DIY FUNERAL

INTRODUCTION:

Funerals are a theatre staged for an audience. The performance of the event must satisfy the perceptions of both the producer and the audience. The object of the drama, the deceased, has little or no input to the event. Funerals have traditionally followed strict cultural customs and it is only in recent times that these traditions are being questioned and new rituals developed.

These days (2005), funerals are being perceived as being overserved and overpriced. Movements within the funeral industry has seen the development of large groups, predominated by one major national player. This can lead to the stifling of smaller operations and a decrease in competition.

During 2005, the Legislative Council of the NSW Parliament opened an inquiry into the funeral industry. The industry is pushing for regulation - currently there is none excepting that funeral directors are required to comply with other related sets of regulation, e.g. Public Health (Disposal of Bodies) Regulation 2002 and the Local Government Act regarding cemeteries and crematoriums. Occupational Health and Safety regulations also apply. At this point in time anyone can become a funeral director, acquire a morgue and a viewing room, have specific purpose vehicles and commence business as a funeral director. Regulation of existing operators consolidates their position and would make it difficult for new entrants to the industry. This makes it easy to force small competitors out and establishes a monopoly with an opportunity to increase prices and margins. Regulation also works for the benefit of the bureaucracy and funeral education institutions which are run by the industry.

Price is an important consideration for consumers. According to the scale of Maximum Benefits Payable for Fatalities under the Workers Compensation Act 1987 the funeral expenses for the death of a worker rose from \$4,400 in July, 2000 to \$9,000 in November, 2004 (26% p.a.) whereas the lump sum payable to dependants only rose from \$296,250 in October, 2004 to \$300,950 in April, 2005 (3% p.a.). This seems to indicate that Workcover acknowledges funeral costs are already increasing at a very high rate.

On the other hand, community based bodies such as Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW and the NSW Council of Social Security see the need for intervention by government as a brake on excessive behaviour by the industry. These organisations, and others, are insistent that the availability of low cost no frills funerals be the price the industry must pay for any regulation and its inherent additional costs.

The maxim in the 21st century is that competition shall prevail and the market will rule.

To ensure protection for the community, consumers must always have the right and the opportunity to choose to run their own funeral for a deceased family member.

TIME

It must be recognised that to organise a funeral takes time.

1. The funeral must generally be conducted within 5 days of the date death of the deceased;
2. The organiser is generally one of the next of kin and whether or not admitted, is in grief;

3. No matter what the circumstances of the death are, it is unexpected;
4. The organiser is generally not well informed on what steps to take;
5. Generally, it is impossible to make all the arrangements and make a coffin at the same time within 5 days, and
6. Time is where the professional funeral directors have the advantage at your cost.

Being informed is the only basis on knowing what choices are available and which choice to make.

This Kit does not intend to suggest that anyone can engage in embalming which is a skill requiring a specific level of education and experience.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RULES

Rule 5 of the Public Health (Disposal of Bodies) Regulation 2002 relates to the mortuary (or morgue), holding room and vehicles used for the preparation of bodies prior to burial or cremation. Subclause (5) and (6)(b) refer particularly to the facilities that are at hospitals and can become available for a DIY funeral. The subclauses say -

"5. Premises for handling of bodies

"

- (5) A person must not, without the approval of the Director-General, use the facilities of a hospital for the purpose of the business of a funeral director or of the operator of a mortuary transport service except for the removal of bodies of persons who died in the hospital.
- (6) The Director-General may give approval:
 - (a) under sub-clause (1), (2) or (3) - either generally or in a particular case, or
 - (b) under subclause (5) - in a particular case."

The Director-General of the Department of Health therefore has the power to allow a person to have access to the mortuary facilities of a hospital for the purpose of arranging a funeral.

It should be noted that there is a mortuary transport service separate from that provided by funeral directors but which funeral directors use for the transport of bodies other than in a hearse. Private transport can be used provided it can carry a coffin with the body, is lined in that area with heavy plastic film and the duration of travel is less than 8 hours.

The Local Council generally controls the local cemeteries and application must be made to Council to get access to the cemetery of your choice. Council will also direct you to a contractor who will excavate the grave. If you intend to bury a body on private land, permission from the Council must also be obtained and the land must comply with rule 22 of the Public Health (Disposal of Bodies) Regulation 2002:

"22. Burial in certain areas prohibited

- (1) A person must not place a body in any grave or vault unless that grave or vault is located:

- (a) in a public cemetery, or
 - (b) in a private cemetery or other place approved for that purpose by a local authority, or
 - (c) on private land, where the area of landholding is 5 hectares or more and the location has been approved for that purpose by a local authority.
- (2) A person must not bury a body in or on any land if to do so would make likely the contamination of a drinking water supply or a domestic water supply."

Inquiries of Standards Australia, the body which sets standards for almost all products and services available in Australia, reveals there is no 'standard' for the production of coffins. The Public Health (Disposal of Bodies) Regulation Rule 19 says,

"19. Bodies to be placed in coffins

Unless otherwise approved by the Director General generally or in a particular case, a person must not bury or cremate a body unless:

- (a) the body has been placed in a coffin, and
- (b) the lid of the coffin has been securely sealed."

In the absence of the definition of a coffin (from the French *coffin*, a chest) a coffin of similar size and dimensions to that available commercially is the only present guide.

With regard to cremations, the Public Health (Disposal of Bodies) Regulation 2002 provides in rule 31 the following:

"31. No refusal to cremate

A crematorium authority must not, without lawful excuse, refuse to accept a body for cremation."

The "without lawful excuse" leaves it open to crematoriums to make it difficult for a person not being a funeral director, to refuse. Some of the grounds, mostly on occupational, health and safety issues, that may be cited are:

1. The lid of the coffin has not been securely sealed.
2. The coffin does not have adequate handles, etc
3. The coffin is not strong enough to carry the body, etc.

Being forearmed may eliminate the problem. It is open to conjecture about what would happen if a body in a coffin together with the fee for cremation were to be delivered to a crematorium and left there.

Within the scope of Occupational Health and Safety rules comes the construction of the coffin and any accessories or articles that may be placed with the body before cremation. Coffins must not have in or on the coffin metal liners, metal inserts, PVC or latex-based rubber materials because unacceptable emissions or residue can result.

Rule 36 says:

"36. Cremation application: dead persons other than still-born children

- (1) An application for cremation of a dead person who is not a still-born child is to be made in the approved form to a medical referee or coroner.
- (2) The form may require any information contained in the form to be supported by a statutory declaration.
- (3) The application may be made by:
 - (a) an executor of the estate of the dead person, or
 - (b) a nearest surviving relative of the dead person, or
 - (c) where there is no such executor or relative available to make the application - a person who, in the opinion of the medical referee or coroner, is a proper person in all the circumstances to make the application."

The Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages also requires formal notification of the death of any person in NSW. Rule 9 of the Births Deaths And Marriages Regulation 2001 states:

"9. Information concerning human remains

For the purposes of section 41 (1) (d) of the Act, the following information is required from a funeral director or other person who arranges for the disposal of human remains:

- (a) the date and place of death of the deceased,
- (b) the sex, date of birth (or age at death) and place of birth of the deceased,
- (c) the usual occupation of the deceased before death and whether or not the deceased was a pensioner or was retired immediately before death,
- (e) the date of disposal of the remains of the deceased,
- (f) the full name of the funeral director or other person who arranged for the disposal of the remains,
- (g) if the deceased was born outside of Australia, the period of residence in Australia of the deceased before death,
- (h) the marital status of the deceased immediately before death,
- (i) if the deceased married at any time, the date of marriage (or age of the deceased at the date of marriage), the place of the marriage and the full name (including maiden family name) of his or her spouse or, if the deceased had married more than once, the date of each marriage (or age of the deceased at the date of each marriage), the place of each marriage and the full name (including maiden family name) of each spouse.
- (j) the given names, sex and date of birth (or age) of the children (if any) of the deceased (including deceased children),
- (k) the full name, maiden family name and occupation of the mother of the deceased,

- (l) the full name and occupation of the father of the deceased."

Before proceeding with a funeral the dead person must be seen by a doctor who can provide the "Medical Certificate of Cause of Death Certificate" and if required, an "Attending Practitioners Cremation Certificate". A dead body can be kept at home (provided the correct temperature is maintained) or in a morgue for up to 5 days - longer requires permission from the Department of Health. A person who has died of an infectious disease cannot be kept at home.

PLANNING THE DIY FUNERAL

The End game - organising the event and the organiser

The options for diy funerals

1. Appointing the organiser - Funeral Directive
2. Advertising
3. The Method
 - (a) Professional Funeral Director
 - (d) DIY
4. The Coffin
 - (a) Making one
 - (b) Buying one
5. The place
 - (a) Burial at home or on privately owned land
 - (b) Public Cemetery
 - (c) Private Cemetery
 - (d) At Sea
 - (e) Cremation
 - (i) Ashes in memorial box at Crematorium
 - (ii) Ashes in urn
 - (iii) Ashes scattered
6. The Transport
 - (a) Hired
 - (b) Private
7. The Ceremony
 - (a) The minimum
 - (b) Church/Hall/Graveside/Crematorium
8. The Wake
9. The Grieving Process
10. Forms

The End Game - organising the event and the organiser

Every family could/should prepare a master plan - the **Funeral Directive**. This master plan could apply to any family member and be capable of rapid modification and execution.

Specific preplanning is for those when death is more predictable. Wills should be reviewed and the executor advised of the appointment so that there are no surprises. The organiser of the funeral should be consulted to preplan the arrangements. A check list is provided with this Kit. Much of the decision making can be done at this stage so that the organiser is left with the minimum to do when the time comes. It can then be done comfortably within time with the minimum of stress.

In more professional terms, the organiser is the project manager and the same methodology applies regardless of which option of funeral is adopted.

The Method

(a) Professional Funeral Director

The Funeral Industry comprises one major player plus a few independents. It is an industry characterised by 'badge' or 'multiple' marketing. This means that many of the companies that you see advertising and offering different levels of service, price or appeal are, in fact, controlled by the one firm. The funeral organiser is confronted by a salesman determined to 'add value', meaning 'adding cost', to what originally appeared to be a reasonable price for a service. "Emotional blackmail" is the term used by many "victims" when being sold a funeral service.

Quotations from funeral directors are often presented in three parts:

1. Professional fees
2. Coffin or casket
3. Disbursements.

The professional fees covers all of the cost of labour to provide the service

The Coffin or Casket price is that quoted from their catalog. It is a retail price and includes a substantial mark-up from the supplier.

The disbursements are the costs of items or other services bought on the funeral organiser's behalf, such as flowers, a celebrant, etc. These items must be supplied at cost unless quoted, in which case the price may include a mark-up from the supplier. An advertisement is a disbursement and is as much an advertisement for the funeral director as it is for the funeral. There is no legal requirement to advertise.

As with all services you should get a written quote for any services and disbursements so that there are no hidden surprises.

There is much anecdotal evidence that many funeral directors add significant amounts to the costs of disbursements. This is a secret commission for the funeral director in addition to his professional fees. It is illegal to accept secret commissions.

Included with this Kit is a Quotation Check List. This is a list of many of the items which a funeral director can include in his services. This list will enable you to 'pin down' which items you want and 'pin down' what it will cost.

(b) **DIY**

The advertisement

There is no legal requirement to advertise a funeral. Advertisements are a courtesy to inform the public at large and also those who are not in close contact with the family but who may wish to pay their last respects to the deceased. The advertisement advises them of where and when the funeral will occur.

The Coffin

(a) ***Making one***

Included with this Kit are working drawings and specifications of a typical coffin. You are on your own from here on!

(b) ***Buying one***

Coffin manufacturers seem to have a restrictive trade practice of only dealing with funeral directors. Your coffin can be sourced through LawConsumers. Included in the range of coffins available from LawConsumers is a 'flat-pack' cardboard coffin which meets industry specifications.

The Place

(a) ***Burial at Home or on Privately Owned Land***

This will certainly take more than 5 days to organise, so must be pre-planned. The forms for the local Council to approve are included with this Kit.

(b) ***Public Cemetery***

The application forms for the local Council are included with this Kit.

(c) ***Private Cemetery***

To bury in a private cemetery may also take more than 5 days and must be pre-planned. The funeral organiser should approach the authority controlling the private cemetery to obtain the necessary application forms.

(d) ***At Sea***

An application is made to the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage. The cost is presently, \$1,000 and a decision takes time. For most it is an objective but not a realistic option.

(e) ***Cremation***

- (i) Ashes in niche or memorial wall at Crematorium - this can be arranged by the funeral organiser.
- (ii) Ashes in urn - the urn or simple container may be located anywhere at the choice of the family.
- (iii) Ashes scattered - care should be taken as to the choice of location and whether any permission may be required.

Access to a Morgue where burial/cremation within the Sydney region

LawConsumers is presently making representations to the Minister for Health to allow the Director of Health to endorse the availability of hospital morgues throughout the State of NSW for DIY funerals. Attached is a list of those hospitals within the State which have morgues.

Access to Transport Contractors for the transport of a deceased person

For a professional funeral director, transport must be in a dedicated vehicle which cannot be used for any other purpose. For a DIY funeral, any vehicle which can accommodate the coffin is compliant and can be used to transport a body from a morgue.

For those who wish to use a professional transport service to relocate a body for burial see the attached list of contractors.

The Ceremony

The extent of the ceremony is only limited by the wishes of the family. There is a tendency emerging for more informal ceremonies. Cultural backgrounds also tend to set the style of ceremony regarded as appropriate.

(a) The minimum - its your guess.

(b) Church - this implies the participation of a minister/celebrant and is a matter of liaison with the minister/celebrant. It is usual for the coffin to be present in the church which presents some logistical transport problems. Pall bearers will be required and a trolley on which the coffin can be placed may also be necessary.

(c) Hall - the arrangements would be much the same as for a church, excepting, that a celebrant or family nominee may be involved instead of a minister.

(d) Graveside - this is preferred informal method. Prior to arriving at the cemetery the funeral organiser must co-ordinate the transport and grave digging and set up any additional facilities that may be required. Weather can play an important part in this part of the planning. The funeral organiser must take care that the gravesite has been secured to prevent a collapse should too many people approach the side of the grave or to restrict close access. The grave digger will be able to give advice as to whether this is necessary. A simple wooden frame is all that is required to retain the sides of the grave and serves a dual purpose to carry the coffin before it is lowered into the grave. To make the gravesite more tidy, exterior grade carpet can be laid adjacent to and into the excavation. Two long straps or rope are used by the pall bearers to lift the coffin off the wooden bearers to enable the bearers to be removed and the coffin then lowered into the grave.

(e) Crematorium - all crematoriums have a hall within which the coffin is placed. Crematoriums have their own mechanical procedure for the removal of the coffin at the end of any ceremony that the family have requested. The coffin is generally located on an elevated platform containing a roller system which, by remote control, removes the coffin from sight at the end of any ceremony and delivers the coffin to the furnace.

The funeral organiser is the person who instructs the crematorium on what to do with the ashes. They can be collected later and kept in any container or urn. Arrangements can also be made to with the crematorium to have the container placed in a niche or memorial wall.

The Celebrant

Celebrants are listed in the Sydney Telephone Directory. Many Ministers of Religion will conduct various levels of ceremonies ranging from the full church service to attendance only at the graveside. LawConsumers has a list of participating Ministers.

The Wake

The wake is the memorial of the deceased. People relax and memories are recalled. Many wakes reveal to the deceased's family sometimes unknown recollections of the deceased by others which help to complete the memory. Wakes are an important social gathering for all concerned.

The Grieving Process

It is a fact that a grieving process occurs. It is different for everyone. It can be instantaneous or delayed but it does occur. Getting on with life should be the objective of all the survivors of a bereavement.

Access to the miscellaneous services covered under 'disbursements'

The funeral organiser of a DIY funeral should follow the Check List with this Kit. Refer to the attached brochure for the range of services and supplies through LawConsumers.

Forms

Funeral Directive

Check List

Quotation Check List

Death Certificate application

Council application form for grave site

Council application form for grave site on private land

Crematorium application for cremation

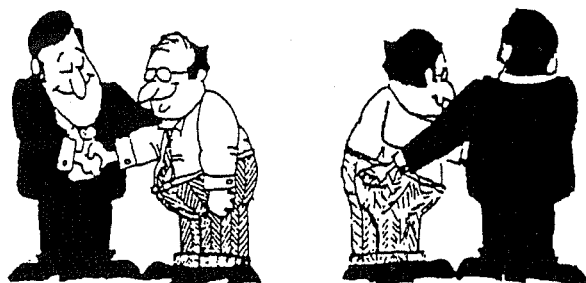
Transport Contractors

Coffins plans and specifications

Grave support plans and specifications

LawConsumers Order Form

List of hospitals with morgues



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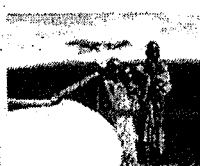
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These search terms have been highlighted: **cardboard coffins united kingdom**



Equator
Initiative

Series 4: **Ecopod - UK**

GREEN
ENDINGS

- March 2004 -

• Plastic
Fantastic -
Italy

• Fine Point -
UK

• Breaking Up
- Spain

• Ecopod - UK

• Paper
Profits -
Zimbabwe

• The Worm's
Turn -
Argentina

VOLT FACE

A GROWING
TREND

COMMUNI-
CATING FOR
CHANGE -
PART 2

COMMUNI-
CATING FOR
CHANGE

WOODN'T YOU
KNOW

NATURALLY
YOURS

When you've got to go

Constructed entirely of recycled paper and environmentally friendly materials, the Arka Ecopod is a radical departure in coffin design. With non-toxic, pollution-free burial guaranteed, choosing an Ecopod ensures one's passing doesn't cost the earth - either ecologically or financially. Produced by a dynamic and ethical family firm based in Brighton, UK, the Ecopod is both robust and attractive.

Ignoring the maintenance of the eco-sphere is a charge many environmentalists would level at contemporary society. Our ecological footprint - the land area needed to sustain our levels of resource consumption and waste discharge - already exceeds the area of the Earth by a very significant amount. By choosing an Ecopod and a natural burial, we may be able to make a difference in death that we were in too much of a rush to make while alive.



Hazel Selene with the Aztec Sun Ecopod

CASH - NO
QUESTIONSTHE EQUATOR
SHOW

CITY SLICKERS

THINK
GLOBAL, ACT
NATURAL

Cradle to Grave Designer

The Ecopod is the invention of Hazel Selene, founder of Arka Original Funerals. Having spent many years working with natural childbirth, Hazel decided to turn her attention to the inescapable conclusion of life. An interest in Ancient Egypt and the rituals surrounding birth and death inspired her design thinking. Death, it seems to Hazel, has become a neglected rite of passage in our society, blighted - as much else - with a seeming addiction to speed and mechanistic efficiency.

Series 5

Series 3

Series 2

"Most people have 20 minutes in the crematorium, with a minister talking about a person they may have never met, and people can't get out quick enough," Hazel observes. "But a funeral should be a colourful celebration of the person's life. I want people to be left feeling 'Wow, that was amazing'."

Series 1

Hands On en
françaisSearch Hands
On

An art school graduate with a love of sculpture, Hazel conceptualised and sketched the design for the new style of coffin during a train journey. The design is a synthesis between a seed-pod and an Egyptian sarcophagus, reflecting the continuous cycle of life and death. When it came to production, awareness of the ecological crisis facing the Earth determined Hazel to use environmentally friendly materials. For the Ecopod this meant those that biodegraded without causing any form of pollution. Where possible, it also meant using materials that would otherwise be discarded.

Hands On
home page

Conventional Coffins



There are genuine environmental problems associated with traditional funerals. Almost 90 per cent of the coffins used each year in the UK - more than 60,000 - are made from laminated chipboard. Though many manufacturers claim chipboard as an environmentally friendly material, made as it is from waste wood, this is certainly not the case when it comes to its use in making coffins. Typically, chipboard, plywood and similar products are manufactured with adhesives that release formaldehyde. A recognised carcinogen, formaldehyde is not the sort of chemical that should be placed where it will leach out and pollute groundwater. Whether via contact, inhalation or ingestion, it is extremely harmful to humans and other biological organisms.

In addition, traditional wooden coffins often include metal nuts, bolts, fixings and plastics that do not readily decompose when buried. The nameplates, handles and linings of chipboard coffins are usually made of plastic. If a coffin is lined to the lid with non-biodegradable plastic, moreover, it will gradually fill with water after burial. Immersion of a body in this manner obviously impedes natural decomposition. In effect, a body may be mummified and remain intact for years. Should grave re-use be officially sanctioned as a way of dealing with the shortage of burial space, as seems increasingly likely in the UK, then this will

become a problem with a very apparent practical dimension.

Pollution from Cremation

As an alternative to burial, cremation is even less environmentally friendly. According to the Natural Death Centre, **coffins** that contain formaldehyde emit 400 to 1000 grams of NOx per cremation. NOx is the generic term for a group of highly reactive gases that contain varying proportions of nitrogen and oxygen. NOx contributes to the formation of ground-level ozone, a phenomenon that can trigger serious respiratory problems in humans. NOx is also a significant factor in the problems of acid rain, global warming and particulate air pollution.

According to the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory, 11 per cent of UK atmospheric dioxins from combustion stems from crematoria. Dioxins are organic pollutants that often result from incomplete combustion. They are extremely toxic, persistent and bio-accumulative - they build up in the tissues of living organisms. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) reports that crematoria also account for up to 15 per cent of UK mercury emissions; emanating from the combustion of tooth fillings. A heavy metal, mercury is toxic to animal and plant life and is also bio-accumulative.

The Ecopod

The Ecopod is 100 per cent environmentally friendly and will not pollute the atmosphere or the earth. Its shell is made from papier mâché that has in turn been made from recycled paper. Strong yet light, the Ecopod weighs only 14 kilos and the standard size can accommodate a six-foot person weighing up to 115 kilos. No synthetic hardeners are used during the production process and the Ecopod's rigidity is derived from the way it is designed and moulded. The Ecopod comes with either a fitted mattress filled with recycled cotton or a feather lining. All papers, paints, shellacs and other materials used in finishing and decorating Ecopods come from eco-friendly sources. As such, the Ecopod as a whole is readily biodegradable when buried in the ground.

Though the Ecopod is suitable for either burial or cremation, as has been pointed out, burial seems the more environmentally friendly option. Nevertheless, if cremation is your burning wish, you can still claim a degree of environmental credibility when it comes to your final ecological footprint by choosing an Ecopod. Research indicates that, compared to a chipboard or wooden coffin, the energy needed for cremation is less when a paper or **cardboard** model is used.

Manufacturing Technology

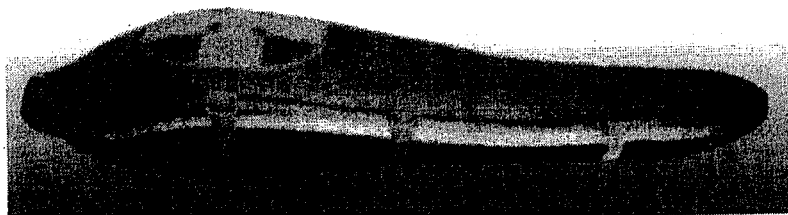
Creating the Ecopod took eight years of market research and product

development. With constant design improvements being made, new models and decoration conceived, the process continues. Currently, the Ecopod is available in five distinctive designs, featuring a range of colours and decorative finishes. Manufacture of the Ecopod takes place in Ireland and is achieved by a family business that has been established there for over fifty years.

John Molloy's company manufactures mainly biodegradable garden pots and trays from moulded paper. Waste paper is shredded and made into a slurry with water. This slurry is sucked onto a mould by a network of pipes built into it. Further suction serves to remove moisture from the formed slurry. Once it is dry enough to retain its shape, the form is gently blown off the mould onto a supporting cradle. It is then dried in kilns where it hardens.

Essentially, the same technology is employed to make the Ecopod. Scaling up from a plant pot to an Ecopod proved a major challenge, however. Apart from having to tool up for a much bigger product, the quality of finish required for an Ecopod was obviously much higher than for a plant pot. Any rejects also meant the loss of a much more significant chunk of investment. One particularly difficult problem to solve was that Ecopods tended to distort during the drying process. John Molloy stuck at it, though, experimenting with drying times and temperatures until he consistently achieved the desired result.

Once moulded, Ecopods are delivered to an industrial unit in Brighton. There they undergo the finishing processes. Softened with steam, any remaining distortion or moulding blemishes are removed. Surfaces are sanded to a smooth finish before decorating with, for example, coloured paper made from silk and mulberry leaves. Adjustable straps are fitted, allowing the pod to be carried by bearers of different heights. Finally, the mattress or liner is secured in the Ecopod.



The Celtic Cross Ecopod features a silver design on hand-made mulberry leaf and silk paper

Overturning Tradition

As with many other examples of modern society's reluctant shift towards sustainable development, technology is only part of the solution. In general, moreover, the technology of sustainability is comparatively easy. The difficult part is changing institutions - the way people think, customs and legislation: in other words, awareness, habits

and rules. Perhaps it is not commonly known or much considered in a society wary of viewing death as a part of life, but under UK law - provided drains and mains services are not affected and there is no commercial gain - a body can be buried more or less anywhere.

An increasing number of people are choosing to be interred in 'Natural', 'Green' or 'Woodland' burial grounds. The rate at which new natural burial grounds are opening is remarkable. In 1993, the Natural Death Centre had recorded just one such site. By July 2003 the Centre knew of 182. Furthermore, the first edition of the *Natural Death Handbook* in 1993 identified only a handful of crematoria and cemeteries that would accept **cardboard coffins**. These days, almost every crematorium accepts them.

In a move designed to ensure quality and professionalism, there is now an Association of Natural Burial Grounds. To become a full member, a burial ground must be willing to allow the use of **cardboard**, paper, wicker, willow and other eco-friendly **coffins** - something traditional undertakers have, until recently, actively discouraged. In natural burial grounds graves are often marked with commemorative trees instead of headstones. Members of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds must allow families to organise a funeral without a funeral director if that is their wish. They must also safeguard funds paid in advance, be able to guarantee the long-term security of graves, and manage sites ecologically - even as our knowledge of exactly what that concept implies develops.

End Notes

Arka Original Funerals offer the Ecopod as part of a coherent sustainable and sensitive approach to bereavement. Hazel Selene and her team advise people not only on their choice of coffin, but also about the pertinent legislation, selection of a natural burial site, and the options for creative funeral services. Arka will take on as much or as little of the funeral arrangements as the bereaved desire. They will organise the ceremony, providing a Minister or 'Celebrant' if required. The Celebrant can incorporate elements of particular faiths and traditions into services. Arka can organise transport and they will provide music at the funeral. Musicians on their books include a New Orleans jazz band, harpists, gospel singers and a Scottish piper.

Is the UK, for once, ahead of the pack? Arka is one of several companies providing affordable, environmentally friendly funeral services, with '**coffins**' including a cloth body bag, **cardboard** or woven bamboo, and even wicker burial stretchers. By contrast, in North America, for example, the funeral industry appears to be focused almost exclusively on increasingly 'luxurious' caskets. An eco-coffin can be hard to find. Presumably because the profit margin is not as great, most funeral directors do not promote them. Moreover, many cemeteries will not accept **cardboard** or similar environmentally friendly **coffins**.

The natural burial movement reminds us of something we have perhaps been conditioned to forget in the modern world. Humans are inevitably part of nature and, as Hindu teachings counsel us, death is the most natural, unavoidable and certain of human realities. Ted Bueler, an ecological planner in the USA, pointed out: 'Because we do not accept that our bodies are part of the natural cycling of the ecosphere, we may find it easier to ignore the maintenance of the ecosphere.'

Acknowledgements

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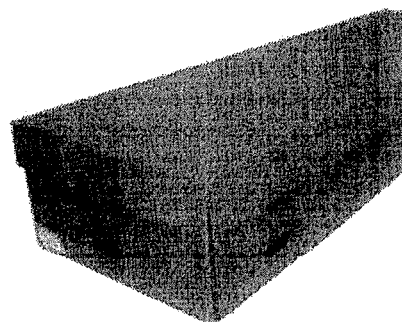
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Introduction

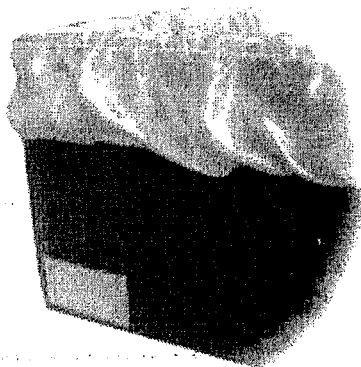
When a arranging a funeral for a close relative or friend, or just making funeral plans for the future, the thought of spending a significant sum on traditional coffin may seem to be at odds with 'the way they lived their or to be incompatible with the environmental ethics that they tried to uphold.

A Cardboard Coffin may be the ideal solution to the problem and can be bought for use in Woodland cemeteries, Green burials, environmentally friendly funerals, or for an alternative funeral where an individual request may include a painted coffin.

Cardboard coffin supplied by ourselves are made from extra thick 'Toughwall' double thickness corrugated board with an additional internal lining for support along the base to provide all the practical requirements needed from a coffin. Each coffin is provided with 3 die cut handles on each side and 1 at each end and can be used for a traditional funeral or a simple



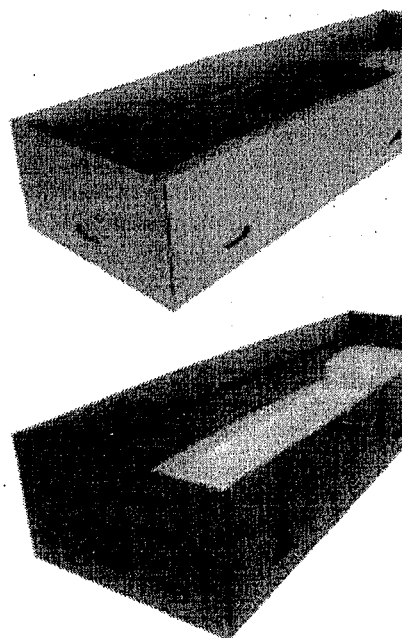
nature funeral where an eco burial is part of the funeral plan.



The Cardboard coffin can be purchased and received either through the post, collected or delivered. This eco friendly coffin itself will be complete and include an engraved name plate requested. (The crematorium cemetery will not accept any of a coffin, whether it is a traditional veneered coffin or bamboo, wicker, willow or cardboard coffin for burial or cremation if the coffin is not clearly identified with the person inside.)

[Click here to purchase in our on-line store.](#)

The interior of the cardboard coffin includes a fitted cardboard pillow as shown. For practical reasons and to avoid any unnecessary distress at the funeral a 'cremfilm' lining is provided. This plastic lining complies with the strict guidelines on emissions at the crematorium and we recommend that the waterproof lining is left inside. Some people may feel that it is inappropriate for an environmentally friendly coffin to contain such a material and may want to remove it. It is important to replace the plastic lining with some other kind of absorbent material if the lining is removed. (Materials like saw dust and shredded paper are not permitted at the crematorium.)



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"Providing essential guidance and practical help for everyone facing a bereavement throughout the UK"

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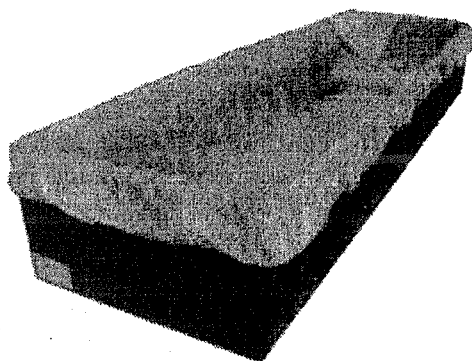
Site design by Wincy Dot

The environmentally-friendly coffin for burial or cremation

The base of the coffin is made 25% recycled materials, while the lid and pillow are made from 75% recycled materials.

This Cardboard Coffin has been tested to a weight of 238lb (17 stones) in conditions without additional underneath support.

The internal measurements are 6'2" long x 22" wide and 12" deep



If required the Cardboard coffin can be supplied with an elasticated frill to fit around the top of the coffin. For some families this may provide a more acceptable traditional appearance, particularly if they and other members of the family want to view the deceased inside the coffin prior to the funeral. A similar effect could be produced by using a plain white sheet instead.

TOP

How much does a cardboard coffin cost?

The cost of the Coffin including the 'cremfilm' lining and engraved name plate is £50.00 plus VAT. Total £58.75.

Where a Cardboard Coffin is to be delivered to an address outside of a 20 mile radius of central Bradford, an additional charge of £55 plus VAT will be made for postage (£35) and packaging (£20), total charge including VAT £123.38. Postage is for next day delivery of orders placed before 10am.

The collection of a Cardboard Coffin from our premises in Bradford or delivery of a Cardboard Coffin within 25 miles of the city centre is free of postage and packing charges.

(All prices are correct at the time they were written and are subject to variation without notification.)

Click here to purchase in our on-line store.

TOP

Prepaid Funeral Plans and Green Funerals

For anyone planning a funeral in advance and who would wish to use an coffin as part of a pre-paid funeral plan, it is important to ensure that the funeral director providing the prepayment arrangements are willing to supply the cardboard coffin as detailed. Should you require any further information be required, contact us on 0800 783 22 25.

TOP

Combining a traditional funeral with a green eco friendly coffin

A cardboard coffin looks exactly as one would imagine it to look, a plain simple coffin that provides a necessary practical function. For anyone who would like to combine the above with the dignity of a traditional coffin see www.coffincovers.co.uk or simply click here.