

Guidelines – Natural Burials



For Consultation - as at 22-02-2023

1 Background

The philosophy of a natural burial is low environment impact.

It is to facilitate decomposition in such a way that human remains will naturally be part of nature again without harming the environment in the process. Accordingly prohibition of headstones, other memorials, artificial flowers and minimal vegetation reflect a natural state.

Where a person or family wishes to have either a headstone, marker or other memorial there is the option to have a 'green' burial within the main part of the cemetery.

In order to achieve the natural burial philosophy:

- No embalming to be used.
- No concrete vaults or grave liners of any kind.

- No artificial flowers, vases, statues, memorials or other manufactured decorations are allowed.
- Families may not create any paths to the grave site, or disturb the surrounding landscape in any way. The ground is left in a natural state and picking of any vegetation is not permitted.
- Woollen shrouds with a solid base are acceptable. The solid base which assists lowering into the ground can be of natural timber and contained within the shroud.
- Plot markers - Only non-treated wooden markers may be used and will be supplied at the time of burial.
- Materials should decompose cleanly with no toxic residue entering soils and waterways following decomposition.
- The container holding the body should break down quickly enough to allow for oxygenation at a shallow depth so the body decomposes cleanly.

2 Objectives

The objectives of the Guidelines - Natural Burial:

1. To provide people with the choice of an alternative burial to traditional burials
2. To reduce the impact of burial and cremations on the environment
3. To maintain the quality of the natural environment
4. To achieve rapid and real return of the body to the earth

3 Acceptable casket/ coffin/ shroud/ platform materials

(1) Caskets or platforms must be made using natural biodegradable materials with no toxic glues or finishes.

For example materials such as wood, non-toxic ply; non-toxic cardboard, wool cotton, woven materials such as flax, bamboo, wicker or willow.

(2) A casket must break down to allow for natural decomposition of the body according to the local minimum cover regulations.

(3) Handles must be made of natural biodegradable materials with no toxic glues or finishes. For example materials such as wood or natural rope.

(4) No lead, metal or plastic fixings may be used with the exception of steel screws and nails.

(5) Casket linings and shrouds must be made of natural biodegradable materials with no toxic glues or finishes.

For example materials such as wool or cotton can be used.

4 Unacceptable casket/coffin materials

(1) Cardboard caskets that have been treated with chemicals.

(2) Caskets with varnish, plastic fittings, glues or plastic sheeting inside the casket.

(3) Caskets leaking fluids.

- (4) Caskets having an obnoxious smell.
- (5) Treated varnish, non-biodegradable material inside or outside the casket.

5 Burial Sites

- (1) Burial sites are 1.2 metres in depth (to the base of the grave) and 2.2 metres in length.
- (2) Location of graves will be kept via a grid system with the deceased being located within a set area but not a rigid space.
- (3) All plots will be allocated in sequence and particular sites cannot be chosen.
- (4) The grave will be backfilled with compost and top soil no less than one metre.
- (5) Graves may take many years to settle back to the original ground level and sometimes they will settle unevenly.
- (6) All graves will be monitored over time for the best ecological “fit” for native plants and the local environment.

6 Site Surrounds and Maintenance

- (1) The Council may undertake selected thinning of and replacement of any native plants or trees and other plant material as appropriate.
- (2) Native seed or plant stock appropriate for the location is selected and supplied by the Wanganui District Council.
- (3) Families will not prune, “weed”, or otherwise harm native plants on or near the gravesite. Picking of native plants is prohibited.
- (4) Council will maintain the natural burials area with a more natural aesthetic to other parts of the cemetery.

7 Infectious diseases

- (1) A person who has died of an infectious disease is to be buried in an eco-casket with appropriate protection against leakage.

8 Plot Markers and Memorials Monuments

- (1) A wooden grave marker may be installed at the head of the plot, at the time of burial.
- (2) The marker shall be:
 - i. no larger than 150mm x 100mm in size;
 - ii. no more than 250mm high above ground level;
 - iii. attached to an untreated timber stem of maximum size 100mm x 100mm; and

iv. centrally located at the head of the plot.

(3) Except as identified in 8(1), no memorials or memorabilia are allowed on plots.

(4) At the time of burial, Council will plant a small shrub or small tree in lieu of a headstone. The tree species will be determined by the Council. Once a section of four (4) or so adjoining plots have been subject to interments, in due course a larger species of tree will be planted to replace the individual shrubs.

9 Disinterment

(1) Disinterment is discouraged for three reasons:

- After some years, it is unlikely that much or anything remains of bodies to recover and move.
- It will require trees to be uprooted to access and dig the plot, setting back the restoration process.
- The wishes of the deceased to be buried at this specific type of cemetery should be respected.