

# UNDERSTANDING CREMATION

ANSWERS TO

Your Cremation Questions



**MISSOURI**  
CREMATION SERVICES



**KANSAS**  
CREMATION SERVICES

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## Welcome to Understanding Cremation by MISSOURI CREMATION SERVICES AND KANSAS CREMATION SERVICES.

The questions included here are ones asked most often by families considering cremation for their own arrangements or those of their loved ones. We've grouped them here by subject, so you can refer to any section quickly.

**We hope you find this information useful & encourage your feedback.**

If you have questions not answered here, please call us toll-free at **1-888-670-0802** or visit **www.missouricremation.com** or **www.kansascremation.com**.





## CHAPTER ONE

# Why Choose CREMATION

### Why do people choose cremation?

People choose cremation for a number of reasons including:

**SIMPLICITY.** Cremation is simple, yet very practical. It allows for flexibility in arranging gatherings to mourn or celebrate the lives of those who have passed away. It also allows each person to express his/her individuality by choosing memorialization, a special ceremony or scattering of ashes in a cherished place.

**AFFORDABLE.** Cremation is far more economical than a traditional burial service.

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC CUSTOMS.** Many religious beliefs and ethnic customs embrace cremation as the social norm. Cremation has existed as long as society has.

**ENVIRONMENT.** There are several ecological or “green” benefits of cremation itself. There are no chemicals used for embalming; nor the need for perpetual maintenance of the grounds at the cemetery.

For these reasons and others, cremation has actually tripled in the past three decades.

### **Are there rules regarding sales of cremation services?**

Laws do vary from state to state; however there are some consistent regulations concerning preparation, transportation and disposition of remains. Service providers will assist the family in obtaining death certificates and any required permits for cremation. That is why it is so important for families or trusted advisors to have immediate access to important paperwork such as military services records, Social Security number, and proof of entitlement to union benefits or life insurance policies.

Since state regulations govern what is required, much of what you must typically purchase as part of cremation is not optional. This can cause confusion, as cremation companies may sell their services ala carte or as a package. Often times, a package price is less than the sum of the a' la carte options. Be careful as you compare advertised prices. Often, the ad will only state the price for cremation itself. The total cost can grow significantly once the mandatory state or federal requirements are added.



An elderly couple, a woman with short grey hair and glasses wearing a light pink top, and a man with short grey hair wearing a light green shirt, are looking at a large white document together. The woman is holding the document and pointing at it with her right hand. They are both smiling slightly, suggesting a positive and collaborative interaction.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Choosing A Cremation SERVICE PROVIDER

### **How should I select a reputable service provider?**

Selecting the right service provider is very important. You may know one who has served you or your family well in the past. If you do not have that previous personal experience or are new in a community, your most reliable method is to research the service provider's reputation. Ask a neighbor, coworker or friend in the community for a reference. Ask about sensitivity to personal needs, attention to detail, and ability to provide the quality of services you expect.

Understanding how a cremation service provider will care for your survivors can be equally, if not more important, than understanding how they will care for the deceased. Ask your cremation service provider if they have a plan to meet the emotional, relational and spiritual needs your family will face following a death.

Feel free to discuss costs and how they handle billing. All good service providers know how to focus on essentials that both comfort the living and honor the deceased.

While service providers can start the process on a moment's notice, they are better able to satisfy a family if there is advanced planning. It's so much harder on the family left behind if the process of making arrangements only begins after a nurse or doctor asks them, "Who do you want us to call?"

The family typically must spend the next several days frantically searching for a capable provider and choosing final arrangements – all at the same time that they are trying to cope with a huge loss. Advanced planning truly is a gift for family and loved ones during this painful time.

### **What should I know about pre-payment?**

When you arrange to pre-pay for your final arrangements, you ease the financial burden on your loved ones considerably. Few people are able to think calmly and rationally when experiencing high levels of stress, loss and grief – one less difficult decision to make during this time is among the kindest gifts you can give them.

When considering pre-payment, it is wise to do two things:

DEVELOP AS CLEAR A PICTURE AS POSSIBLE of your financial situation now and over the next few years, so you know what plans and services you are comfortable choosing.

DECIDE WHETHER YOU PREFER to pay in full as one lump sum or in a series of smaller, manageable payments. If circumstances allow it, paying in full will often cost you less than the convenience of paying over time. However, if you prefer or need an installment plan, ask your service provider about their policies and options.

Many people assume that by simply saving or investing on their own, they can cover the costs when the time comes – but unfortunately, that doesn't always work out. Lengthy illnesses or nursing home expenses can wipe out savings they counted on. Also, such funds are often subject to taxes and early withdrawal penalties, and they may be tied up in probate.

Also, realize a pre-paid plan may qualify as an exempt asset if you have to apply for public medical assistance.

### **How can I be sure those funds will be safe?**

This is perhaps the most important question you should ask. Although laws vary from state to state, when you deal with a reputable, licensed professional service provider, you may be sure that whatever you've invested in will be there when it's needed.

### **What about costs?**

As mentioned earlier, providers tend to offer both individual ala carte pricing and package pricing. Your cremation service provider will be happy to provide general price lists for all services and merchandise. Prices have increased over the years and will most likely continue to do so. Putting your plan into place and paying for it in advance will save you considerable money...you will not be impacted by future increases.

### **What if I move or change my mind?**

Pose these questions to your potential service provider and be sure they answer them clearly for you. Ask:

*"If I decide later to change to another service provider to carry out my plans, will I be entitled to a full refund?"*

*"What should my family do if I am living somewhere else at the time of death?"*

Years, even decades, may pass between pre-arrangement and the actual need for services, so we cannot always be sure of where we'll be living or who we'll want to deal with when the time comes. That's why we strongly advise people to select a pre-paid plan that is "portable"... transferable to any agreeable service provider should you elect to change plans at a later date.



## CHAPTER THREE

# Planning AHEAD

### **Won't my last will and testament express my wishes?**

In many instances, a will is not read until the deceased's arrangements have taken place. Relying on a will to express your wishes regarding final arrangements is risky. Chances are, what is stated in your will and what actually happens may not be the same.

### **What is "advance planning?"**

This process, also known as "pre-arrangement" or "pre-need", is straightforward. In essence, advance planning is choosing as well as paying for final arrangement so that everything is in place before death occurs.

### **Why think about final arrangement planning now?**

There are significant financial, personal and family advantages to making one's final arrangements in advance:

**YOU PROTECT YOUR PARTNER OR LOVED ONES FROM UNNECESSARY STRESS AND CONFUSION.** Deciding what you want now brings your loved ones peace of mind. You spare them from facing confusing choices and difficult decisions during a time of great personal loss.

**YOU'LL PAY FAR LESS FOR THE SAME PLAN.** Like all goods and services, the cost of cremation increases regularly. By making your arrangements now, you pay today's lower rate for tomorrow's need.

**YOU CONTROL WHAT YOU WANT.** Sadly, many deaths occur suddenly without any warning. Stroke, heart attack, traffic accident – these are just a few incidents that can instantly take an apparently healthy person of any age at any time. If you believe having a choice is important, now is the time to make those decisions – while you are able to do so.

In short, pre-planning is less costly; ensures us a say in how we'd like to be remembered; and most importantly, doesn't leave the burden to our family and friends to make these difficult decisions during an emotionally-painful time.

### **Can I count on government benefits?**

Many people are surprised at how limited these benefits are.

Social Security, for example, may award limited benefits to a surviving spouse of deceased workers who were covered and fit certain guidelines.

People who are on, or expect to apply for Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may pre-arrange a funeral without affecting their eligibility. Final expense with cremation service providers are considered exempt from personal assets.

Military veterans' benefits may include flags, grave markers, military rites and a plot in a national cemetery; but eligibility depends on length of active service and the type of separation or discharge.

Realize that Social Security and veterans' benefits are not automatically sent to you. Someone has to do the legwork of completing the forms and submitting them for benefits. Payment may not be received for several months.

You can get details from experts in each of these agencies – Social Security Administration, State SSI/Medicaid Department, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Service providers are happy to provide direct contacts for those who need information as part of pre-planning, and will make the necessary calls and help with documentation as part of their cremation services.

### **What else should I think about along with final arrangements?**

Ideally, you will also have other important tools in place besides your final arrangements. These may include an *advance directive*, or “*living will*,” to guide doctors, hospital staff and family in making medical decisions, should you become incapacitated.

If you haven't already done so, this part of pre-planning is also a good time to consider *organ donation* and *estate planning*.

### **What details should I be thinking about for how my life will be celebrated?**

WHERE? Possibilities include a house of worship, restaurant or family home. (Hosting a funeral at home was fairly common generations ago and is certainly not unheard of today).

WHEN? Unless a religious doctrine dictates the timing, considerations may include scheduling at the facility of your choice, with allowances made for travel time so loved ones who live far away can attend. For a visitation or wake, you may want to establish calling hours.

WHO? Consider guests (including family, friends, business associates, and co-workers). Once the list is completed, considerations should be given to what products or services need to be purchased, rented or arranged.

FORMAT AND PERSONAL TOUCHES? People are often surprised to learn that some religions have a prescribed format, while others are extremely flexible. For a non-religious service, you have many options. In virtually all cases, personalized touches will include favorite music and readings. Should one request the most elaborate, top-of-the line merchandise? Or should austere simplicity be the guide? Most arrangements will fall somewhere in-between.

OTHER ITEMS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE a register book, prayer cards and thank-you notes for visitors and attendees of the service. All are available in a wide range of prices.

**OBITUARY NOTICES?** Information for an obituary notice is best gathered in advance. In the emotional hours immediately after death, it is easy to overlook a vital detail or make a mistake on an important fact. Once the obituary is published, it's usually too late to fix the hurt or sadness that an unintentional error may cause. Cremation service providers can assist with writing and submitting obituary notices in newspapers. Many cremation service providers also have online and social media outlets to post obituaries, reducing the cost of printed obituaries and making electronic obituaries easy to share.

Family and friends will also want to know whether flowers are appropriate or whether the deceased would have preferred memorial gifts to a favorite cause, organization, church or charity, or to a child's or grandchild's education fund.

### **Can I plan a farewell ceremony or memorial with cremation?**

Because cremation has no geographical borders or boundaries, it allows an individual total flexibility to express their life in very personal ways and share with survivors what they cherished most. Many people are finding many unique ways to celebrate their lives

If you would like to incorporate some type of farewell event that captures your unique spirit and the way you live and view life, there are many personalized memorialization choices. Loved ones can become a part of a beautiful living ocean reef. Cremated remains can stay with loved ones, made into a piece of jewelry or other emotional keepsake. Their remains can be sent to space in a rocket, incorporated by fireworks, become part of an oil painting, etc.

There really is no “*standard*” cremation service or format. What is the best advice? Allow your choices to reflect your unique spirit and to provide an emotionally satisfying and fitting farewell to those who will attend. This will provide special meaning that feels right to you and comforts your loved ones who are left behind.

## Should I involve others in my planning?

Most definitely...since it will be the immediate next of kin who will be responsible for carrying out the person's wishes, it's only logical to include them in this initial planning. In fact, many service providers strongly urge a person to bring his or her spouse, partner, children, siblings, or a trusted friend along to discuss prearrangement.

There are two important goals to meet when pre-arranging: (1) it is what the deceased person wanted; and (2) offers surviving friends and loved ones as much social and spiritual support and healing as possible.

## What will my children think?

Whether you are planning for yourself or your parents, we understand that this can be a very real concern, especially when younger children overhear adult discussions and see final arrangement planning materials. They fear that a parent or grandparent may be terminally ill or likely to die soon.

While each family situation is different, we suggest a calm, honest and reassuring discussion in terms that the children can understand.

Teens and adult children are able to understand and appreciate your desire to give them peace of mind by helping to relieve future financial and emotional burdens. In all cases, pre-arranging can be a good opportunity to teach responsible planning for the future. You are demonstrating loving concern for the children's needs by putting a plan in place now that will ease their suffering during a stressful time that may be decades away.





## CHAPTER FOUR

# When A DEATH OCCURS

### **What happens when a death occurs?**

These steps may vary between states, but the basic process is the same.

IF A PLAN HAS BEEN PRE-ARRANGED, most likely the deceased will have a card in their wallet with the name and phone number of the cremation service provider. They also may have provided their closest family member or friends with this information.

IF THERE IS NO PREARRANGED PLAN IN PLACE, you may want to obtain a referral to reputable cremation provider from other family members, a doctor, a member of the clergy, or a lawyer. The phone book and internet are good sources of information, but please first review the Chapter 3 section in this guide, entitled “Choosing a Cremation Service Provider.”

WHILE EACH PROVIDER MAY HAVE DIFFERENCES in their process, here is the basic process used by our staff to carry out your loved one’s wishes:

- A call to the Missouri Cremation Services or Kansas Cremation Services is all that is needed to start the process, from anywhere in the world.

- We dispatch professionally trained personnel to transport the deceased from place of death to a licensed climate-controlled holding facility for care and storage.
- Careful steps are taken to safeguard the privacy and dignity of the family and deceased.
- Families are contacted as quickly as possible after a death, and information is gathered to initiate and coordinate services.
- Forms, certificates and authorizations must be completed according to applicable laws before a cremation can take place.
- Once the necessary authorizations and documents have been properly signed and have been filed with the local health department, the cremation usually takes place within 3 to 5 business days.
- In most cases, if a death has occurred without a plan in place, we can complete all necessary paperwork via phone, fax or email.
- In certain circumstances, it may be necessary to meet with our trained staff at the local office or at your home, to complete arrangements and to obtain specific information about your wishes.

### **What documents and signatures are needed?**

A death certificate is required by law, and is initiated by our staff with the necessary information provided by the family. Permits for cremation cannot be obtained until the medical authorities provide these signatures.

Realize that cremation service providers have no control over the length of time necessary for these signatures to be obtained. Autopsies and medical records may delay signatures by physicians and medical examiners.



We hope this guide has answered your questions about cremation, pre-planning, provider choices and urgent at-need situations.

Whether you are exploring advance planning for yourself or making arrangements for a family member, loved one or friend, please don't hesitate to call us at **1-888-670-0802** or visit **[www.missouricremation.com](http://www.missouricremation.com)** or **[www.kansascremation.com](http://www.kansascremation.com)**.

Our Caring Team  
**STANDS READY**  
To Help You  
**IN ANY WAY.**

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ANSWERS TO  
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