

Green Burial Education: Then and Now

by Sam Perry

WHEN I ATTENDED MORTUARY SCHOOL, the topic of green burial was virtually nonexistent. Our curriculum touched on ancient burial rites, handling unembalmed remains, and the funeral customs of major religions, particularly Jewish and Muslim practices. However, discussions on green burial—essentially, a simple burial, no embalming, a biodegradable container, and in a green cemetery—were absent.

Nonexistent Times

Reflecting on my time as a student now that I'm a lecturer in mortuary science, I find it striking that my notes from over 15 years ago contain no references to green burial, save for a few optional projects where I could incorporate eco-friendly themes. For instance, I chose "Green Embalming" for my final project, developed a marketing pamphlet centered on my green ethos, and

After graduation, I was determined to educate others about sustainable death-care practices, both within and outside the industry.

Mandated Education

Fast forward 15 years, and we see significant progress. Mortuary schools are now mandated by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) to

environmentally conscious deathcare, underscoring the seriousness with which the funeral profession is embracing these options.

Not long ago, I frequently encountered skepticism from established funeral directors who deemed green burial a passing trend. I spent countless hours advocating for this cause during my education and in my early career. Now, however, over 60% of consumers are interested in exploring more environmentally friendly options according to an industry survey. The American Board of Funeral Service is taking heed, adapting educational standards to prepare the industry for this shift.

Today, funeral directors are not just asking why they should offer green burial, but how they can implement it. As someone deeply passionate about this movement, it's heartening to witness this change. The growing acceptance of green burial practices fills me with hope and excitement for the future of the funeral service industry—a future that aligns with our collective commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability. ❏

These advancements mark a significant step forward for the future of environmentally conscious deathcare, underscoring the seriousness with which the funeral profession is embracing these options.

created a hypothetical event for a green funeral home as part of a computer assignment (yes, we had a whole class dedicated to computers!).

Back then, my passion for environmentally sustainable deathcare practices was often dismissed. In 2009, I even contemplated leaving mortuary school. However, everything changed when I discovered the Green Burial Council (GBC), founded in 2005. A supportive instructor also recognized the importance of green funeral services, helping me find my place in the industry.

I began visiting GBC-affiliated cemeteries, connecting with funeral directors who shared my vision, and actively promoting these options through a growing network.

include green burial in their curricula. The ABFSE has updated its guidelines to define terms like "green burial," "green cemetery," and "green funeral."

Students are now learning about the environmental and public health implications of these practices, how viewings can be adapted for green funerals, and the necessary preparations for the body. This includes understanding regulatory aspects, such as transportation, types of merchandise to use, and the management of green cemeteries.

They are also introduced to alternative disposition methods, like cryonics, alkaline hydrolysis, and natural organic reduction. These advancements mark a significant step forward for the future of



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