

MEETING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Funeral Practices, Spreading Ashes & Caring For The Environment



It is the Environment Agency's job to look after your environment and make it a better place – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, they are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.

Environment Agency

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PROTECTING CONTROLLED WATERS FROM THE IMPACT OF FUNERAL PRACTICES

Faith groups and individuals follow different traditions and practices when a loved one dies. For some this involves spreading the ashes of their dead in rivers and streams, others wish to bury their dead at home. They do not want to interfere with these traditions unless there is good reason.

There is no evidence to suggest that either the disposal of human ashes in rivers and streams or home burials have a negative impact on the environment. But there is concern that other aspects of these practices, such as casting tributes and other objects into the water at the same time as the ashes, could harm the environment or upset other river users.

This leaflet outlines guidance on preventing any harm to the environment as a result of funeral practices.



SCATTERING ASHES ACROSS SURFACE WATER

Ashes themselves have little impact on water quality; other items should not be placed in the water with the ashes. Personal items and wreaths might contain plastic and metal parts, which can cause litter and harm wildlife. They must not be put into the water or left on the riverbank where they could be washed into the water.

Individual ceremonies to spread ashes are unlikely to pollute the water. But you will need to carry out the ceremony with care and check the following things first.

- make sure the effect on the environment and wildlife is minimal
- the ashes scattering will not affect other watercourse users
- do not include the casting of wreaths or memorabilia as they may harm the environment and wildlife

If you are unsure, please phone your local Environment Agency office to check.

If the recommendations in this leaflet can be met in full, then you do not need our permission to proceed with your ceremony. If they contact the environment agency to discuss possible alternatives.



HOME BURIALS

Advice on alternative funeral practices that can minimise harm to the environment and on home burials can be found at a number of sources, including the Natural Death Centre.

If you want to bury individual human remains at home you must follow the minimum groundwater protection requirements. You should contact your local council to let them know you are planning a home burial.

You may need to speak to the environmental health department.

To protect groundwater and surface water you should check the following points before the burial.

- The site should be more than 30 metres from any spring or any running or standing water. It should also be more than 10 metres from any 'dry' ditch or field drain.
- The site should be at least 50 metres away from any well, borehole or spring that supplies water for any use. If you are not sure where these are, our local office will be able to advise you.

All graves must:

- have at least 1 metre clearance between the base of the grave and the top of the water table
- they should not have any standing water in them when dug
- not be dug in unaltered or unweathered bedrock
- not be dug in areas susceptible to groundwater flooding
- be deep enough so at least 1 metre of soil will cover the top of the coffin, body or animal carcass

DISPOSAL OF ASHES

- You do not need permission to scatter ashes from a single cremation on your own land, or make any formal record of doing so.
- You should seek permission from the landowner if you want to scatter ashes on someone else's land.
- The burial of cremated ashes is unlikely to cause harm to the environment and can be carried out without reference to the Environment Agency.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you can fulfil the requirements of this guidance then you do not have to contact the environment agency before you prepare for the spreading of ashes or a home burial. If you need to confirm any details about the environment or you would like to ask us any questions, please call the below phone number for help

WOULD YOU LIKE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY?

Then call on

08708 506 506 (Mon-Fri 8-6)

Email

enquiries@environmentagency.gov.uk

Or Visit

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency>

Incident Hotline

0800 80 70 60 (24hrs)

Floodline

0845 988 1188

