

Human Interment Guidelines

In unincorporated Delta County CO., the burial of human bodies on private property is allowed. The Delta County Health Department (The Department) defines a cemetery as a place where more than three bodies are buried. A cemetery may require special approval by the Delta County Planning Commission. People in incorporated areas should check with their municipal officials on what requirements their city or town might have.

While there are no specific standards for cemeteries, burials, and body preparation, etc. from an environmental perspective, we have developed these guidelines. The Department feels this practice needs to be regulated with the least amount of interference to the families involved, while mitigating the possible public health impacts.

The Department has developed specific burial recommendations. They include:

1. Every body must have a burial permit from the appropriate Vital Statistics Office. This is a requirement by State Statute (25-2-111 CRS) and the requirement for a burial permit is statewide.
2. The Department does not require any body container like a coffin or vault. Some religions may preclude body containers. The Department was unable to identify any special reason to require the body to be in a container or preserved in any other way. In most cases, from a disease perspective, the quicker the decomposition the better.
3. The Department recommends that the grave not be located in a significant drainage swale or near a watercourse. This is to keep the body from contaminating water or being washed out by high water. Interment should be as high and dry as possible.
4. Graves must be set back at least 100 feet horizontally from any spring, well or other drinking water source.
5. The Department recommends that the body be covered by at least 4 feet of compacted soil. Odors can escape; and dogs, coyotes and other wild animals may find and exhume bodies in less than 4 feet of compacted soil.
6. The Department also recommends that the body be interred at least 4 feet above ground water. The body could conceivably contain the same disease agents that might pollute ground water.
7. The State Statutes require that the grave be permanently identified both at the site of the interment and on the legal documents for the property (25-2-111 (7)). Future owners or residents of the property could be perplexed if

they inadvertently discovered a body. Assumptions of a crime scene, a valuable ancient artifact, or other assumptions are possibilities. The Department feels permanent identification of the gravesite is important.

CREMATION

The Department would extend these same recommendations regarding the internment of cremains. Cremains from an approved crematory are biologically benign; however we would prefer consistency in handling the burial of the deceased.

On Site Cremations: There may be some real health and environmental issues with non-commercial cremation, but so far there have been no problems in Delta County. Many on-site cremations could create different outcomes and lot size may be a potential issue. A funeral pyre on a small city lot could certainly have a different outcome than the same activity in the middle of a 10,000-acre ranch. If many on-site cremations are conducted they may create Public Nuisance conditions. At that time, formal regulation may be required.

Cremation on one's own property is not prohibited but must follow some practical recommendations.

1. Adequate fuel to complete the task must be provided. It takes many millions of BTU's and a significant length of time for a cremation that results in nothing but ash with no identifiable body parts.
2. The cremation site must be as private as possible. The potential for odor and particulate fallout is there and could be an issue in certain areas.