



One of the definitive markers of humanity is the manner in which we ritualise the disposal of our dead. For hundreds of generations we have been giving the bodies of those we love to the elements; earth, air, fire, and water. Yet in recent years we have become increasingly innovative with the mechanisms by which we do this. New and emerging techniques being shared widely via the internet and social media have increased the visibility of available options – with particular emphasis on environmental impact.

This fact sheet outlines some of these methods, past, present and future, drawing attention to the contemporary offerings in Australia.

EARTH – THE BODY IS PLACED INTO THE GROUND

BURIAL (CONVENTIONAL) | AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA

The body is buried in a coffin and may have been embalmed. The grave is deep, possibly allowing for double or triple depth burials, and some cemeteries in Australia are vaulted – meaning that each grave has a concrete lining. Graves covered with a durable monument made of granite, marble or limestone.



NATURAL BURIAL | LIMITED AVAILABILITY IN SOME STATES

If someone has said to you something along the lines of ‘keep it simple and bury me under a tree’ chances are they might be interested in natural burial, sometimes referred to as Green or Eco Burial. **Natural burial is the practice of burying a human body in the earth, in a manner that allows for natural decomposition with minimal impact on the surrounding ecosystem.**

PRIMARY PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL BURIAL:

- Natural body care (no embalming)
- Dressed or wrapped in natural fibres (cotton, linen, wool, silk)
- Coffin / shroud made from natural fibres
- Shallow grave, single interment
- No headstone or monumental work, only minimal and natural memorialisation (trees, flat stone, clay)

TYPES OF NATURAL BURIAL GROUNDS:

- Stand-alone natural burial ground – land designed, operated and maintained with native fauna to sustain regional ecosystems
- Hybrid cemetery - mix of conventional + natural burial areas
- Conservation Burial Ground – land rejuvenated through planting + burials
- Private burial – a burial on your own property. Laws differ between states.

NDAN actively advocates for more natural burial options in Australia.

VERTICAL BURIAL | LIMITED AVAILABILITY IN SOME STATES

The body is placed in a vertical position in a biodegradable body bag and buried on a rural property. There are no headstones or grave markers used. Visitation to the site is limited.

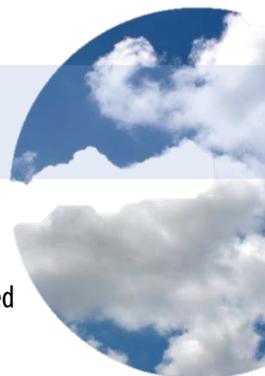
RECOMPOSITION | FUTURE POSSIBILITY

Innovation by the Urban Death Project (US) which is investigating composting of the body within a facility based proposed to be based in major cities. Families receive soil at the end of the process which can be planted. Currently undertaking pilot project.

AIR – THE BODY IS LEFT ON THE SURFACE OF THE GROUND

SKY BURIAL | NOT AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA

Hailed as one of the most simple and effect methods of body disposal, Sky Burial or Exposure Burial is a practice that has emerged from a Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. A body is placed on a mountaintop to decompose while exposed to the elements or to be eaten by scavenging animals, especially carrion birds.



FIRE – THE BODY IS INCINERATED THROUGH HEAT



CREMATION (CONVENTIONAL)

| AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA

The body is placed into a coffin or casket, and after a funeral transferred to a cremation chamber where it is exposed to temperatures of up to 900 degrees Celsius. The bone fragments remaining at the end of the process are turned into a fine ash, sometimes referred to as 'cremains', which are returned to families who may then choose to keep, scatter or bury them.

CREMATION (DIRECT)

| AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA

Follows the same process as above – however the body is usually collected and transported straight to the crematory prior to a memorial service. Families may choose to have a memorial service at a later date.

SHROUDED CREMATION

| LIMITED AVAILABILITY IN SOME STATES

Shrouded cremation is the practice of cremating the human body in a manner consistent with the principles of natural burial including natural care of the body, dressing in natural fibres, the absence of embalming and without the use of a coffin. The ashes that remain are then returned to the family who may keep, scatter or bury them.

NDAN actively advocates for shrouded cremation availability in Australia.

OPEN AIR CREMATION/FUNERAL PYRE

| NOT AVAILABLE IN AUSTRALIA

A practice common in some cultures, an open air cremation or funeral pyre involves the use of wooden structure on which a shrouded body is laid before being set on fire in an outdoor location. Some states in the US are beginning to introduce open air cremation sites.

WATER – THE BODY IS DISSOLVED



BURIAL AT SEA

| LIMITED AVAILABILITY

Sea Burial is the disposal of shrouded human remains in the ocean, normally from a ship or boat. A permit is required for burial of bodies at sea. Permits are usually only granted in cases of a strong connection to the sea, for example long serving navy personnel.

AQUAMATION/ RESOMATION

| FUTURE POSSIBILITY

Aquamation, sometimes referred to as resomation, alkaline hydrolysis or water cremation uses a combination of water, high temperature, and alkalinity to accelerate the natural course of tissue and chemical breakdown. A naked body is placed within a aquamation unit and after processing a powdery remnant similar to that of cremated ashes is returned to the family who may keep, scatter or bury them.

CRYOMATION / PROMESSION

| FUTURE POSSIBILITY

Cryomation, sometimes referred to as promession, involves freezing a body by immersing it into liquid nitrogen at which point it becomes extremely brittle after which it is fragmented through pressure. Water is then removed and the remnants made inert and suitable for composting.

OTHER USEFUL FACTS:

You do not have to use a funeral director – you can keep a person home after death – you can take a body home from hospital – build your own coffin – sew your own shroud – you can dig and backfill grave with cemetery permission.

Contact NDAN if you would like to know more or would like us to host an educational workshop for your local community.

Visit our website , send us an email or join our facebook page for more information and updates.

 www.ndan.com.au

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 NDAN – Natural Death Advocacy Network