

Questions & Answers:

1. **Is a concrete outer casing always used with caskets (to prevent land sinking, etc?)** I doubt that concrete vaults are used in every cemetery, but it's my understanding that it is a very common requirement for American cemeteries. Since so many cemeteries are large, sprawling properties it would be a real bear to manage that landscape with anything other than large industrial equipment. It's always best to check with individual cemeteries about what their specific requirements are, since they are private businesses who get to set their own rules. Many cemeteries are willing to compromise if there's a reason you don't want a vault around your casket, like for many Jewish folks whose faith dictates that their body must be touching the earth so it can fully return to it. I've heard of cemeteries turning the vault upside down and placing it over the casket sort of like a butter dish, so they can still have the needed support on the plot to keep the ground from sinking in, but also the family is still able to honor their dead according to tradition.
2. **While costs will vary greatly, can you provide some information about costs for conventional methods versus these two newer options?** For Washington residents, the best resource for funeral costs is going to be our biennial price survey. Every other year People's Memorial Association contacts every Washington funeral home (with very few exceptions) and requests updated pricing information from them. All of that info lives [on our website](#), where you can print out a big spreadsheet, or you can search by a couple of different parameters. It's really worth your time to take a peek at this free data since we have uncovered that the cost of a direct burial can vary by over 400% and a cost of a direct cremation can vary by well over 700%. (Direct in these instances just means that you don't have any memorial services, but rather the deceased is buried or cremated without any fanfare, which is a surprisingly popular choice.) We hope that this resource can save you a few phone calls and get an idea of what to expect well in advance of needing anything. Knowledge is power!

I normally do talk a bit more about costs of different services, but I didn't want anyone to feel like I was trying to sell them anything. The prices for different funeral services vary wildly depending on where you are. If you are interested in either burial or cremation, definitely take a look at the results of our biennial Washington State price survey. You can find that here: <https://peoplesmemorial.org/education-and-advocacy/price-survey.html>.

Only about half of Washington funeral homes list their pricing on their websites, so you may have to physically visit your local funeral home for additional information. The FTC does require funeral homes to provide you a written general price list if you walk in the door, so don't let anyone push you around!

For alkaline hydrolysis, it's going to depend entirely on the funeral home, since they will have to contract out to the lone machine operator we have in the state right now. The [Co-op Funeral Home in Seattle](#), which is our member-owned funeral home, charges \$1250 for PMA members and \$1500 for nonmembers for this service. Hopefully that gives you at least one comparison point if you decide you'd like more information on that service. For natural organic reduction, Recompose offers a 5% discount for PMA members on services that they normally charge \$5500 for.

3. **Are you able to explain the process of composting?** Certainly, but I think the best resource is the Recompose website, since they were the first licensed funeral home to offer this. They have a really cool [graphic of the process on their website](#). If you have questions about composting, which is legally called "natural organic reduction" in our state, it's best to contact those folks directly for answers. They're much brainier than we are about soil science and all that good stuff!
4. **Is it legal to get buried in your yard? On your acreage?** Here in Washington, unfortunately no. A lot of folks call and ask us about this, so it's a real shame that it's so difficult to get access to. You would be required to contact your municipality (depending on where you are this might be your city or it might be the county) and apply to have your land zoned as a cemetery. This process can be pretty onerous and very expensive (I've heard numbers with commas in it!). If it's something you are really passionate about, reach out to your local zoning folks now to figure out what this process might look like.
5. **I would imagine there is growing demand for alkaline hydrolysis and human composting as more people learn about them but not as many companies currently offer those services. How accessible are these newer options right now?** So far, I believe that alkaline hydrolysis has been legalized in 18 states and natural organic reduction has been legalized in one other state than Washington. There are lots of folks popping up around the country to bring these options to their own states to increase funeral choice in their communities, which is so exciting! Here in our state there is only one alkaline hydrolysis machine, so any funeral home that is offering this service to their customers is contracting the service out to that provider. Depending on which part of the state you are in, this can potentially be pretty pricy with transportation fees. For a long time many WA funeral homes were contracting with a Portland-based provider to bring this option to the families they serve. I'm sure this will change over the next couple of years, but the necessary machinery is a major capital cost for a business and there aren't many manufacturers that can produce/maintain/service the equipment. For human composting, there are I believe three businesses here in WA offering the service, but each of them is offering a different version of the process and different accompanying services.

Additional questions? Check out People's Memorial Association's website: [People's Memorial Association | Washington | Funeral Choice \(peoplesmemorial.org\)](#)

One of the local "Natural Organic Reduction" aka - human composting options is Recompose: [Recompose — Our Model](#)

Water cremation for companion animals: [Seattle's Pet Funeral Home | Resting Waters Aquamation](#)