

1. When it comes to cremation, are there rules about what you can do or where you can spread remains?

Illinois has a Cremation Regulation Act which states that cremated remains (cremains) can be placed, buried or scattered on private property with the permission of the property owner. Cemeteries will also have their own rules which govern how the disposition of cremains can be done within the cemetery. Public locations such as parks, beaches, golf courses and baseball fields are private property and therefore should not be used as a location for placing cremains.

2. What about bodies of water such as oceans or lakes?

For those who choose to scatter cremains in open bodies of water, there are a few suggestions: If you are planning on scattering them while on a cruise, keep in mind how very windy it can be on an open deck of a cruise ship. It is always recommended to be as close to the water as possible and try for a very calm time of day when scattering. There are also cremation urns that are made of paper mâché that cremains can be placed in and then floated out into the water. As the paper mâché becomes soaked, it will slowly begin to sink - which is another option for "scattering" over water.

3. When I die, I want to look my best. What do you do about hair? What do you do about making someone look as natural and yet as good as they can look?

The funeral director will ask the family for a recent picture of the deceased, which helps with their preparation, hair dressing and applying cosmetics. Many people, when making their own pre-arrangements, will provide the funeral director with a photo of themselves to be used at the time of need. Funeral directors do their very best to make you look not only your best, but also peaceful as this will be your family's final memory picture of you.

4. What kind of decisions are made at a pre-arrangement meeting?

Pre-arrangements can cover a wide spectrum. Some people will simply state what their funeral home preference is while others will cover every detail. These would include things such as final disposition, location and times for visitation and services, all merchandise selections (casket, vault, urn, memorial cards, visitor register book, etc.), death notice and obituary details, participants (clergy, musicians, eulogists, pall bearers, etc.) – basically all the details that would have been decided at the time of need. This is why many families find it helpful to discuss funeral arrangements prior to need.

5. I've always wondered what is involved in the embalming process?

Very simply put, embalming is a temporary preservation of the body so that it can be present for viewing and services prior to burial or cremation. It involves replacing the blood and body fluids with a preservative chemical which is primarily a formaldehyde solution.

6. What is the procedure and paperwork for donating to science? And what was it and has it changed over time? And if they aren't returned to the family, what might have happened to them?

There are a number of authorizations that are either completed by the individual in advance or by the next of kin at the time of need directing that the body be donated to science for anatomical study. After the study has been completed, the body will be cremated. The length of the study can range anywhere from a few weeks to a number of years. The authorizations include how and where the cremains are to be returned to the family. Many years ago, how the cremains were returned was not a part of the donation process and so they were generally scattered at the cemetery where the cremation took place.

7. What about organ donation? How quickly does that have to happen after death, especially if the death happened at home versus in a hospital?

For a donation of organs, such as a heart or lungs, to take place, the death must take place in a hospital which would need to be prepared to perform the procedure. In Illinois, organ donation can also include bone and skin and in that case, must usually be completed within 24 hours of death. The funeral home must be made aware of this request so that they can contact the Gift of Hope organization to see if logistically a donation can be completed. Many times it is not practical for a donation to be completed if the death does not take place where a refrigerated morgue is available. Organ donation does not prevent having an open casket and viewing. However, additional time will be needed for the additional preparation which is necessary.

8. Is the cremation done somewhere else or at the funeral home?

Most funeral homes do not have a crematory on site. Therefore, the majority of cremations are done either at a cemetery or another dedicated facility.