



## Consider Environmentally Friendly/Green Burial Options

Environmental concerns with traditional burial and cremation methods include the emissions and use of fossil fuels, impact on global warming, and perpetual use of land. Green burial, resomation, and recomposting are fairly new and may seem weird, although, as eco-friendly options, they are gaining acceptance.

### Resomation

**Resomation** (also called **aquamation, water disposition, flameless cremation, alkaline or potassium hydrolysis**) is legal in Illinois, though sporadic in availability. (in Morris and South Holland.) Most funeral homes can advise and coordinate this service, whether or not their other services are used. Involving water, temperature, pressure, and alkalinity to accelerate the natural method of decomposing organic matter, it provides the same results as flame cremation but with **75% less fossil fuel energy**. The body is placed in a tank of 100 gallons of water (the average 2-person household usage in one day), with 5% alkaline added, pressurized, and heated (not to boiling). The process can take 3-5 hours. The “slurry” has nutritive value, but may not be possible to collect it for use around plants. (If not, with no environmental harm, it is sent to the municipal water treatment facility. That’s likely the least appealing aspect.) As with cremation, bones are crushed and made available to the family, although they have no nutritive value. It tends to be less expensive than traditional funerals and cremation. Costs can include transportation and permits. (ref: Mary Roach, “Stiff” [book] final chapter.)

### Recomposting

**Recomposting** gently transforms bodies into soil, which then can be returned to families who can use it to nourish plants. It has evolved from cattle ranchers, who used an outdoor process of wood chips, water, etc to compost dead animals. For humans it is done inside steel tanks. It mimics the earth’s natural cycle and is similar to what occurs on the forest floor. The task is carefully monitored by professionals. Bones and teeth do not fully break down, but are crushed (as with cremation or resomation), then mixed back with the soil. Microbes, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen and moisture are ratio controlled. Any implants are removed and when possible recycled. The Ph range is 6.5–7—ideal for most plants. It typically takes a total of 8–12 weeks, in stages. Wood chips, alfalfa and straw are used, and the temperature in the beginning of the process is raised to 131°. The soil is then moved to a curing bin, where it is aerated for 3–5 weeks. Each body creates about a cubic yard of soil (3x3x3) and weighs 500–1000 pounds of nutrient-rich soil. Families can take some, or donate to conservation efforts. With a permit, you can even transport the body to a state where this service is legal (the closest to us is Minnesota). It **uses the least energy of all processes** (87% less than traditional burials or cremation, and **saves 1 metric ton of carbon pollution**. That’s the equivalent to the CO2 emissions of driving 2,481 miles or 1,102 lbs. of coal. and sequesters carbon! Cremation (50% of 3 million deaths/year) burns fossil fuels and emits carbon dioxide and particulates. Conventional burial consumes valuable urban land (which could be parks!), pollutes the soil, contributes to global warming (including resource-intensive manufacturing and transport of caskets, headstones, and grave liners.) Every year in the U.S. caskets alone use 4 million acres of forest to manufacture. (YES Magazine, Fall 2019, p.23);(Recompose, in Washington state, 206-800-8733 will gladly answer questions about recomposting.)

Recomposting is currently legal in 12 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. It is also under consideration in 12 more: Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, **Illinois**, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Utah.

**In Illinois, HB-3158, Natural Organic Reduction Regulation Act, was introduced in Feb. 2023, and was last considered in Jan., 2025.** (Recompose, in Washington state, 206-800-8733 will gladly answer questions about recomposition.)

If the person dies in a hospital and has advanced directives, organs can be donated prior to recomposting. Embalmed bodies can be donated and used for medical research for 1–2 years, but cannot then be sent for resomation or recomposting.

The median cost for a funeral with coffin burial is \$8,300 (plus the cost of the plot.) Cremation is \$6,250. Recomposting, where available, may run \$7,000. The costs vary. This is an approximation.

## Summary

Before the Civil War, bodies were largely tended to at home by women, who washed and dressed the body and hosted home wake sessions. The Civil War brought new challenges—families desired the return of their dead soldiers, and battlefield embalming became the answer prior to transporting bodies by train. Since then, our culture has largely depended on funeral homes to handle everything, and we even live in a sense of denial—we don't want to talk about death, and use euphemisms such as “passed away” and “deceased.” Today we have **five choices for the final treatment of a body**:

1. **Traditional/embalming**, using the services of a funeral home, often with open-casket viewing; burial in casket and cement vault in a cemetery that requires perpetual maintenance. A BIG industry.
2. **Cremation**, usually with the services of a funeral home, “ashes” can then be buried in a cemetery or given to the family. Can use less cemetery land, but is very high energy use. 50% of today's choices.
3. **Green burial**, without embalming, but with a natural casket, decomposing over time; probably needs the services of the funeral home. Environmentally friendly except for the land use. Gaining in practice.
4. **Resomation/aquamation**, with minimal need of funeral home services, “ashes” given to the family. **In our area**, this is the **most environmentally friendly** (for less energy use and less cemetery land.)
5. **Recomposition**, **Most environmentally friendly**, with alfalfa and straw, etc and time for the body to naturally decompose, resulting in usable nutritive soil, not a cemetery. **Not yet legal in Illinois.**

Also: Many people arrange a memorial service, either at a funeral home (“parlor”!) or at a church or even someone's home or a park. This usually does not involve the presence of the casket, and is more likely done any time after the death. This practice invites that newer ways of disposition (items 3–5 above) become acceptable. Note: “burial at sea” simply means scattering the remains usually from a boat. Whole body at sea burial requires 600 feet of water depth. It can be arranged with the Navy from a deployed ship, no family in attendance.

In the first week following a death, the family makes hundreds of decisions. Advance planning can ease this process and be helpful for those who grieve. Whatever thoughts you have should be discussed with your family, especially if it might be difficult for them to agree with. **Discuss your thoughts with the people who will carry out your wishes.**

## Local Resources

- **Caring Cremations**,  
223 W. Jackson St, suite 200A, Chicago. 773-866-2273.
- **Simplicity Funeral and Cremations**,  
1210 Darien Path Way, Darien. 630-445-1439.
- **Modell Funeral Home**,  
7710 S. Cass, Darien. 630-852-3595 works with Colonial Chapel, Mokena.
- **Casper Creek Natural Cemetery**,  
870 S. Pilot Rd., Galena, 815-677-3411

