

What To Do First?

When a death occurs there are so many things to consider and decisions to make. These lists can help you navigate through them.

When a Death Occurs

At Home: If the deceased was under hospice care, notify the hospice nurse. The nurse will contact the funeral home on your behalf. If the deceased was not under hospice or another at-home medical care provider, call 911.

At a Hospital: Inform the hospital which funeral home you have selected. The hospital will contact the funeral home on your behalf once they have completed their necessary documents.

At a Hospice Facility: Inform the hospice facility which funeral home you have selected. The hospice staff will notify the funeral home on your behalf.

At a Nursing/Long Term Care Facility: Notify the staff as to which funeral home you have selected; they will notify the funeral home on your behalf.

Out of State/Out of the Country: If a death occurs away from home you should notify your local funeral home. If you plan to have the deceased casketed and brought home, or if you plan to have services in your home town, your local funeral home can help facilitate transportation and coordination with a funeral home where the death occurred.

Contact These People As Soon As Possible

- The funeral home to set an appointment to make further arrangements
- Relatives and friends
- Personal representative
- Cemetery where you want or own property
- Employers (the employer of the deceased and relatives who will need time off)
- Insurance agencies (life, health and accident)
- Religious, fraternal, civic, veteran's organizations, and unions (if applicable)
- Lawyer and accountant

Secure Vital Statistics of the Deceased

- Full legal name - other names must be identified by "Also Known As" (AKA)
- Date and place of birth
- Social Security Number
- Home address
- Father's name and birthplace
- Mother's name and birthplace, including maiden name
- Occupation and Industry
- Level of education reached

Documents to Collect

These may be required to establish rights for insurance, pensions, survivor benefits, ownership, etc.

- Will
- Military discharge papers (discharge certificate or DD214)
- Legal proof of age or birth certificate
- Marriage license
- Citizenship papers (if not a US Citizen)
- Insurance policies
- Bank books
- Deeds
- Car ownership papers
- Income tax returns, receipts or canceled checks

Discuss with Funeral Home

- Whether your loved one is to be buried or cremated
- Service details (e.g. would you like a visitation period, a formal service, a reception?)
- Clothing the deceased will be buried or cremated in
- If a member of the clergy will be engaged for the service
- Pallbearers, music, pictures, flowers, scripture or readings
- If you would like a charity to receive donations in memory of your loved one
- The funeral director will ask if you have made any arrangements with a cemetery. If you have not done this, you will need to visit the cemetery.

If Casket Burial

- Would you like other members of the family to be with your loved one in the future? This determines the size and type of cemetery property needed.
- What type of memorial would you prefer (a marker set flush with the ground, or an upright monument)?
- Is an in-ground liner or vault required?
- What type of presentation would you prefer for the burial service, e.g. a tent canopy, chairs, mats leading to the graveside etc.?

If Cremation

- Would you like to schedule a viewing or visitation prior to the cremation?
- Would you like to use our chapel for a short service prior to the cremation?
- Would you like your family to be present at the time of cremation?
- What type of urn would you prefer (metal, wood, marble, ceramic, biodegradable, etc.)?
- What type of engraving would you like on the urn?
- What type of final resting place would you prefer for your loved one (ground burial, above ground niches, or scattering or placement of cremated remains in a cremation garden)?
- Would you like other members of your family to be with your loved one in the future? This determines the size and type of the final resting place.

Burial of an Urn

- An urn vault may be required for ground burial at your local cemetery.
- What type of memorial do you prefer (e.g. a bronze or granite marker set flush with the ground, an upright monument, or a cremation bench)?

Above Ground Niches

- Would you like the niche to be inside a building or outside?
- Would you like the niche to be glass-fronted so that you can display personal mementos?

TIP: Determine the measurements of the niche to ensure the urn will fit properly as each columbarium varies in size.

Scattering of Ashes

In Pennsylvania, there are no state laws controlling where you may scatter ashes. Cremation renders ashes harmless, so there is no public health risk involved in scattering ashes. Please be considerate and refrain from scattering ashes in places where they would be obvious to others.

Immediate Payment Expenses

- Funeral arrangements, including clergy, florist, newspapers, transportation, casket and/or urn, and other selected services and merchandise
- Cemetery charges (e.g. lot, opening/closing of the lot, vault or liner, selected headstone or other memorial)
- Current and urgent bills (i.e. mortgage, rent, taxes, telephone, etc.)