

“Guidelines for Scattering Ashes”

When a family member or close friend dies, those left behind are faced with many difficult decisions. Some of these decisions have to do with the final resting place of the person who has passed away. If the deceased has chosen to be cremated, there's the question of what to do with the ashes. Often times, a family will decide to not keep the cremated remains of a loved one. They might choose to scatter the ashes of the deceased instead. A survey done by the Cremation Association of North America states that about 135,000 families each year have chosen to scatter ashes and that the number is only expected to increase. Your client might have many questions in regards to the proper procedure or legality of doing this. Below are some general guidelines that will allow you to better assist these families.

One of the biggest misconceptions in regards to cremation is that the cremains are similar in weight and texture to the ash that comes off of wood in a fire. This can lead people to believe that when scattering ashes, the remains will be easily dispersed in the wind. This, however, is not the case, so it is important to explain to clients that the consistency of cremated remains will be more like sand.

It is also important that you communicate to your client that the decision of how and where to scatter ashes is an important and irreversible one. It is a good idea for your clients to think ahead and spend ample time making sure that they won't regret their decision later on. For example, access to the scattering site could be restricted in the future due to commercial development or private ownership. Access might even just be more difficult because of the family relocating to another part of the country. If families do decide to scatter the ashes of the deceased in a spot that will be difficult to locate or visit again, they might consider setting up a permanent memorial as well, where the loved ones can go to reflect.

Another issue is the legality of scattering ashes in certain areas. Most publicly owned land does not require permission for scattering, but all private property does. Usually, only a warning will be issued if laws are not complied with, but there was a case where one man ran onto the Eagles' football field during halftime to scatter his mother's ashes. He was fined and required to complete community service. However, this is usually only a punishment for very flagrant law breaking.

Your clients will want to scatter the cremains of their loved one in a unique and meaningful way, and they can. When it comes to scattering ashes, there are many different methods from which to choose:

Casting: This is the basic method of tossing the cremains into the wind. This can be done individually or in a group, but be sure that your client remembers to have the wind blowing at his or her back in order to avoid unpleasant consequences. Also, though most of the ash will have the consistency of sand, there are some parts that are more like fine powder, and that portion will be able to be picked up by the wind.

Raking: This method can be done at home but is often used in scattering gardens that are now located in a large number of cemeteries. With raking, the family and friends scatter the ashes on the ground and then rake them into the earth.

Trenching: This is a shallow burial of the ashes. First, a trench is dug; ashes are placed there, and then they are covered again with soil at the end of the ceremony. A slight variation of this

can be done on the beach where the ceremony ends with the tide coming in and washing the cremains out to sea.

Ring: In order to do this, the client would pour a ring made up of the ashes around a chosen object (often families choose to do this around a tree). Another variation is to make the ring and then have family members and close friends step inside the ring to share a story of the deceased.

Shared Resting Place: Many cemeteries will allow someone's ashes to be buried on top of the cemetery plot of the deceased's spouse.

Water: The US code for scattering ashes into the ocean requires that the people who are doing the scattering be at least three miles off the coast. It is suggested that the boat be turned into the wind and that the scattering be performed at the back of the boat. If people are not mindful of the wind, the ashes could come back towards them or get stuck to the boat. Biodegradable urns are also available so that the ashes can simply be placed in the water and be slowly dispersed under water. It also might be a good idea for the family to record the navigational coordinates of the scattering site just in case they wish to return to the spot in the future.

Aerial: With this method, the ashes are cast from a private plane. Professionals can be hired who will plan to scatter the ashes at a specific time and location in order to coincide with the funeral ceremony. Some of the pilots will also allow passengers to attend.

Widely Scattered: Some people keep the cremains in a portable, plastic bag and bring it with them around the world to scatter the ashes in different places. According to an article published in the New York Times, one woman from Maryland took her husband's cremains with her everywhere she traveled and would scatter them at different famous sites such as the Coliseum in Rome and the Christmas tree at the Rockefeller Center.

As you can see, there are a variety of different ways in which your clients can scatter the ashes of their loved ones. Deciding how cremated remains will be scattered is an important decision to the family and friends of the deceased and so your expertise in the area is a perfect opportunity for you to continue to serve them in their time of need.

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