

GWENT CREMATORIUM

Information on Coffins

The standard coffin currently used by most Funeral Directors is made of chipboard with a good quality wood veneer or wood effect film finish. The nameplate, handles and inner linings are all made of artificial materials, mainly plastic. These coffins are used for both burial and cremation.

When used for cremation, chipboard coffins cause the majority of the small amount of pollutant emissions that arise. It should also be appreciated that the manufacture of chipboard uses formaldehyde which is not considered to be environmentally friendly.

There are many alternatives available these days to the bereaved, ranging from American style and ornate coffins to those made of wicker, bamboo and cardboard. From 1994, it has been possible to obtain biodegradable cardboard coffins. These arose out of the advent of environmentally friendly, "green" burial schemes opening around the country, and quickly became utilised for traditional burial and cremation. Research undertaken in Europe has proved that cardboard coffins offer a significant reduction in pollutant emissions arising from cremation. These coffins also offer the advantage of lower cost and are rigid, leak proof and easy to carry. Cardboard coffins can also be painted attractively or personalised if so desired. It is possible to cover the coffin with a "pall"; a velvet-type cloth, if the cardboard finish is felt to be visually upsetting.

Another recently developed "green" option is the burial shroud. This consists of a board, upon which the body is laid, the whole being wrapped in a large piece of woven, soft, wool cloth. The shroud is sold with black, pure cotton ropes attached for use by four or six bearers. The shroud is suitable for all types of burial, but not for cremation.

If you wish to make or purchase your own coffin, please contact the crematorium for advice over suitable materials, suppliers, design, dimensions and costs. Alternatively, we may be able to procure a coffin at competitive prices on your behalf. Other materials that are biodegradable and potentially available for coffin construction include plaited willow, bamboo and straw. Please note that whatever coffin is chosen, it must have a rigid base in order for it to be easily handled and placed in the cremator.

As a general rule, coffins for burial should be constructed to the smallest size possible for health and safety reasons. For cremation, the design, construction and materials used in the coffin must be such that it minimises possible emissions of pollutants and the use of fossil fuels. Even the use of varnishes or oil based paint should be avoided, to prevent the possibility of flashback when the coffin is placed into a pre-heated cremator.

The Federation of British Cremation Authorities (FBCA), which represents a large proportion of cremation authorities in the UK have issued a directive on coffin design which has prohibited the use of certain materials which pollute the atmosphere, such as PVC, Zinc, Lead and Rubber. It is important that due consideration is given to the explosion or pollutant impact of anything placed in a coffin, especially for cremation; thus heart pacemakers and battery-powered medical implants should be removed before the body is placed in the coffin. Even clothes made of man-made fibres or rubber shoes can cause smoke and pollution.

No metal furniture or fittings should be used on coffins for cremation except as required for its safe construction and then only ferrous screws should be used. Jewellery and artificial joints pass through the cremation cycle without difficulty.

The use of sawdust or cotton wool must be avoided when lining the coffin for cremation.

Home made rectangular shaped coffins can normally be accepted at Gwent Crematorium up to an **absolute maximum** of **31" wide**, but can only be **20" deep**, and **83" long**.

Should you require any further advice on issues relating to coffins, please contact the crematorium, where a member of staff will be pleased to assist you.

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