



Environment
Agency

Funeral practices, spreading ashes
and caring for the environment

meeting
the needs
of families
and the
environment

We are the Environment Agency. It's our job to look after your environment and make it a **better place** – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, we are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.

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Protecting controlled waters from the impact of funeral practices

Faith groups and individuals follow different traditions and practices when a loved one dies. For some this involves spreading the ashes of their dead in rivers and streams, others wish to bury their dead at home. We do not want to interfere with these traditions unless there is good reason.

There is no evidence to suggest that either the disposal of human ashes in rivers and streams or home burials have a negative impact on the environment. But we are concerned that other aspects of these practices, such as casting tributes and other objects into the water at the same time as the ashes, could harm the environment or upset other river users.

This leaflet outlines our policy on preventing any harm to the environment as a result of funeral practices.



Spreading ashes on water

Ashes themselves have little impact on water quality; other items should not be placed in the water with the ashes. Personal items and wreaths might contain plastic and metal parts, which can cause litter and harm wildlife. They must not be put into the water or left on the riverbank where they could be washed into the water.

Individual ceremonies to spread ashes are unlikely to pollute the water. But you will need to carry out the ceremony with care and check the following things first.

- The site you choose should not be near any buildings, people bathing or fishing, or marinas.
- Your site should be more than 1km upstream of any abstraction of water. You can check this by phoning your local Environment Agency office.
- Ashes should be spread as close to the surface of the water as possible and you should avoid windy days so that ashes do not affect people living or working nearby.

If the site you have chosen is in regular use, we will need to assess it first to check there is enough water to disperse the ashes, that no one is using the water just downstream and that other river users are not going to be affected. Your faith group leader or undertaker should be able to tell you. If you are unsure if we have assessed a particular site, please phone your local Environment Agency office to check.

If the recommendations in this leaflet can be met in full, then you do not need our permission to proceed with your ceremony. If they cannot be met, you should contact us so that we can discuss possible alternative sites.

Home burials

Advice on alternative funeral practices that can minimise harm to the environment and on home burials can be found at a number of sources, including the Natural Death Centre.

If you intend to bury a loved one at home, you might wish to contact your local council's Environmental Health Department, who should be able to advise you. To protect groundwater and surface water you should check the following points before the burial.

- The site should be more than 30 metres from any spring or any running or standing water. It should also be more than 10 metres from any 'dry' ditch or field drain.
- The site should be at least 50 metres away from any well, borehole or spring that supplies water for any use. If you are not sure where these are, our local office will be able to advise you.
- When preparing the grave, make sure there is no standing water when it is first dug and that the grave is not dug in very sandy soil.
- There should be at least one metre of soil above and below the body after burial.

The burial of cremated ashes is unlikely to cause harm to the environment and can be carried out without reference to us.

Contact us

If you can fulfil the requirements of this guidance then you do not have to contact us before you prepare for the spreading of ashes or a home burial. If you need to confirm any details about the environment or you would like to ask us any questions, please call us and we will do our best to help.

**Would you like to find out
more about us, or about your
environment?**

Then call us on

08708 506 506 (Mon–Fri 8–6)

email

**enquiries@environment-
agency.gov.uk**

or visit our website

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 (24hrs)

floodline 0845 988 1188



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