

Spring
2024

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Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge



Thinking Green

Newsletter options

The FCAVBR newsletter is being mailed to about 250 members and sent electronically as email to another 60 members. There are many benefits to electronic receipt. First, you receive the information sooner. Second it can be filed in a way that meets your organizational style. Third, it is easier to find the newsletter attached to an email than on a piece of paper. Fourth, fewer trees are sacrificed and, Fifth, it is more efficient for the volunteers involved in this effort.

If this greener method appeals, please send an email to fcavbr@gmail.com titled "Newsletter by email", no text is needed!

Westview Cemetery, Blacksburg, Virginia

Thanks to our appeals to Blacksburg Town Council, Westview Cemetery has been licensed for "Green Burial". While the cemetery still requires participation of a funeral home, they will accept burial without embalming and in a way that lets the body return to the earth and become part of it.

On April 24, at 11:00 a.m., Blacksburg Public Works Director, John Boyer, gave a presentation on green burial and answered questions about the services Westview provides. As part of Warm Hearth's 50th anniversary celebration, the Village Center hosted and provided refreshments in support of this event.

You can't get any **greener** than

Natural Organic Reduction

This method was discussed at the Wake Forest Symposium on March 1 (see article on next page) by Katrina Spade, founder of "Recompose". Learn more about human composting by following the youtube link at the end of the article. (This offers easy access if you receive the newsletter electronically)

Spring 2024 Newsletter Contributors : Bill Baker, Kim Marye,
Phil Olson, Linda Plaut, Dianne Rencsok

The Future of Death Care in America

On March 1, 2024, the Wake Forest Law School hosted a Law Review Symposium, “The Future of Death Care in America” sponsored by the Cremation Association of North America (CANA). Over 800 participants (in person and online) heard from three different panels of death care experts. Attendees included members of the National FCA and a local affiliate; conservation and green burial providers; funeral industry leaders and death care providers; academics from a variety of disciplines; law school students; and members of the general public.

The Symposium kicked off with opening remarks by Law Professor Tanya Marsh, author of *Cemetery Law*, and *The Law of Human Remains*. Professor Marsh teaches the only course in Mortuary Law in the United States. Then, mortician, blogger, and author, Caitlyn Doughty, delivered the symposium’s keynote address, which positioned the need for death care reform against the backdrop of a three-part history of US funeral care.



The first panel, “Regulating New Methods of Disposition,” was moderated by FCAVBR’s own Phil Olson. Cremation, alkaline hydrolysis (water cremation), and natural organic reduction (composting) were described. The panel included the Executive Director of CANA, Barbara Kemmis, Creighton Law School Professor Victoria Hanneman, and Katrina Spade, the founder of natural organic reduction pioneer “Recompose”.

Next, Wake Forest archaeologist Terry Brock presented information about his work to identify and preserve African American cemeteries in North Carolina.

Convening after lunch, the second panel discussed “Licensing Funeral Directors,” with particular emphasis on the distinction between the licensing of funeral directors and the licensing of embalmers. Members of this panel included Kenyon College economist David Harrington, Lawyer Renee Flaherty of the Institute for Justice, and Caressa Hughes, Assistant Vice President at Service Corporation International (SCI)



The final panel was devoted to covering “Consumer Protection—the Future of the Funeral Rule”. Discussed, as previously noted in the FCAVBR newsletter, was the need (or not) for funeral service providers to post General Price Lists (GPLs) online. Participants in this panel included Wake Forest law professor Tanya Marsh, National Home Funeral Alliance President Isabel Knight, Poul Lemasters of the International Cemetery, Cremation & Funeral Association (ICCFA), and Sarah Pojanowski of Selected Independent Funeral Homes, a 100 year old funeral trade association.

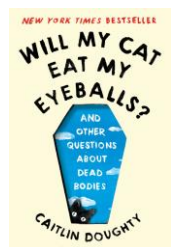
These voices—sometimes converging in agreement, while at other times expressing strong disagreement--succeeded in airing many of the challenges and opportunities facing death care in the United States. including: the challenges of scaling up “green” death care technologies like alkaline hydrolysis, natural organic reduction, and green burial; addressing the growing labor shortage in death care; concerns about transparency and threefold consumer-provider-regulator relations in the arena of death care.

There is more information about the Symposium on the Wake Forest Law Review website at <https://www.wakeforestlawreview.com/wake-forest-law-review-symposia/>

Video recordings of the Symposium are also available on youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkcyIfDz9UDmB-qoroLA9GDcDORdsi-tk>

The youtube recordings are very informative, for even more resources:

Caitlin Doughty, symposium keynote speaker, has written some entertaining books. <https://caitlindoughty.com> This book is one of several, available in the Montgomery- Floyd Regional Library system.



<https://www.endswellcremation.com> North Carolina establishment that provides alkaline hydrolysis (Aquamation)

The website for Natural Organic Reduction in Seattle <https://recompose.life/>
See what looks like a beautiful, white honeycomb, where composting occurs.



The mystery of Alkaline Hydrolysis and the Virginia state legislature

A current member of the FCAVBR, Bill Baker, routinely monitors and reports on the meetings and regulations of Virginia's Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers (FD&E). Other members follow bills presented in the Virginia legislature that have an effect on death care in our state.

The 2024 session activities were followed in depth by member, Kim Marye. She reported favorable results as HB 52, a bill for Alkaline Hydrolysis (AH), passed through various committees, only to be killed in the Senate. HB 52 was similar to SB 1487 from the 2023 legislative session which added the process of AH to statute regarding cremation and granted the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers the power to regulate and inspect same. SB 1487 received the same treatment in 2023 as did HB 52, seemingly earning approval but not final acceptance.

In the 2022 legislative session, a Bill, SB 129, was approved requiring the FD&E Board to convene a work group to study how to legalize, implement, and regulate the process of alkaline hydrolysis. This was done and FD&E created a report before the 2023 legislative session. The report recognized that standards would differ from current cremation processes but seemed to accept this as a valid procedure.

In several previous issues of this newsletter, AH has been described as a cleaner, greener option for care of our deceased. It would seem to be a benefit to have it available in our state.

Another observation deepens the mystery. Bill Baker's FD&E report shows that legislation was given a more complete description and timeline than ever before and that timeline matched the ongoing reports provided to FCAVRB board members by Kim Marye. In previous years, legislative activity has been addressed by the FD&E board in statements such as "provided overview".

The April 2023 FD&E minutes were expanded over the usual "provided overview". These minutes are quoted here "Mr. Novak provided an update on pending regulatory actions and the status of bills of interest in the General Assembly. The Board briefly discussed these updates. Ms. Tillman Wolf provided a general reminder that there is no statutory provision in Virginia to allow for alkaline hydrolysis at this time, as the legislation introduced this year died in the House during the General Assembly session."

Will legislation for AH be introduced in the 2025 session? After the November election, legislators, new and returning, can start filing for bills to be introduced when the session starts in January. Will the sponsors for 2024 HB 52 or 2023 SB 1487 still be in the Virginia legislature in January 2025 and will they still be interested in trying again? How invested is the FD&E board and in what way? What can we, as knowledgeable caring consumers, do to have an effect on Virginia's laws?

Who knows? Stay tuned. If you would like to receive updates as actions happen, please send an email to fcavbr@gmail.com with the subject "Legislation"

FEMA Covid death update

As of Jan. 1, 2024, FEMA received more than 488,338 applications totaling more than \$3.15 billion for 499,096 decedents due to COVID. This program ends 30 Sep 2025. Like Flu, Covid seems to now be part of our lives. People can still die from both illnesses. However, until Sep 2025, if Covid was listed as the diagnosis of death or phrasing on the death certificate is “as a result of Covid-19” FEMA Funeral assistance may be available.

The information available notes that the death would have occurred after January 20, 2020, but does not clarify if there is a final date of death criteria. If you have paid for Funeral Expenses for someone whose death was related to Covid, call the COVID-19 Funeral Assistance Helpline at 844-684-6333

FEMA may approve COVID-19 Funeral Assistance for expenses such as:

- funeral services
- cremation
- interment
- costs associated with producing death certificates
- costs due to local or state government laws or ordinances
- transportation for up to two people to identify the person who died
- transfer of remains
- casket or urn
- burial plot
- marker or headstone
- clergy
- funeral ceremony
- funeral home equipment or staff

**GPL (General Price List) surveys for Funeral Homes and Cemeteries
will be posted soon**

Throughout the years, individuals who have attended one of our presentations, or visited our website have asked us to include specific Funeral Home or Cemetery establishments in our survey. Both surveys were completed this year, 2024. We have decided to limit our requests to the area described on our website: *We serve residents in the counties of Montgomery, Roanoke, Giles, Floyd, and Pulaski; cities of Roanoke, Salem, Bedford, and Radford.* Organizations, whose information was included in previous years' surveys, received requests for data in 2024. However, if no data was provided, we did not send reminders or follow up with any outside the area described as above. If a member wishes to see data from an establishment outside our area, they must send to us the pertinent information for us to include in the chart.

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Newsletters Available on FCAVBR website.

The fcavbr.org website has many end-of-life resources. These include, newsletters and annual meeting minutes from the last several years, related books and DVDs with links to the ones available in the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library system, videos, articles, copies of documents such as an Advanced Directive, and, of course, Surveys of current General Prices for Funeral Homes and Cemeteries. Please take the opportunity to review the website offerings. The 2021 Cemetery Cost Survey and the 2022 Funeral Home General Price List (GPL) Survey will soon be replaced with information from 2024. The entire website has recently been redesigned in order to make information clearer and more readily available. Let us know what you think!

Send an email to fcavbr@gmail.com

If you would like to help us reduce our carbon footprint and save resources, you can request newsletters or bulletins be sent to you electronically by sending an email to fcavbr@gmail.com with the subject "Newsletter by email".

Funeral Home and Cemetery surveys will be available at the fcavbr.org website. If you need to see a printed copy, send us an email with heading Paper and, in the text of the email, include a description of the survey or pamphlet or document you desire.

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