

Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge

New format for newsletter

You may notice a new look to this newsletter. Knowing that an increasing number of people on our mailing list have requested to receive an electronic copy and that many of those read the newsletter on their phones, we are changing the format to make it easier to read on a smaller screen. We hope this works well for all our readers.

If you would like to receive the newsletter by email (a greener alternative), please send your name and email address to us at fcavbr@gmail.com.

Annual meeting

A very interesting presentation by Kim Garnett, anatomy lab manager, on the cadaver program at Via Medical College sparked a lot of questions. The Virginia State Anatomical Program supplies 6 medical schools, 17 colleges and universities, 5 community colleges, and 2 biomedical institutions in the state. If you intend to be an organ donor, this program is not for you. It requires whole bodies. No matter what you decide, it is important to make your wishes known to your family and consider designating an agent to insure your wishes are followed.

Election of board members for the 2022 term and executive officers can be seen on page 3.



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Special points of interest

- Perrin Heartway writes a passionate and convincing argument for green/natural burial.
- Reconsidering the total environmental impact means examining all costs.

Outreach

Showed *Dying Green* at Jesse Peterman Library in Floyd
Presented *Saving Money on Funerals* at Elderspirit in Abingdon
Presented *Death on a Dime* at Jesse Peterman Library in Floyd
Presented *Going out Green* for Christiansburg Rotary
Obituaries presented to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Blacksburg
Spoke to Heartland Hospice staff detailing the information we have to help families
Program at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Christiansburg
Sponsored 2 Death Cafes (Christiansburg & Roanoke-partnered with Heartland Hospice)
Booth at Triad Senior Health Fair, Christiansburg
Booth at Health and Wellness Fair, Christiansburg
Booth at Agency on Aging Caregivers conference, Dublin
Booth at RU nursing school health fair, Christiansburg

Provided information – to our area and beyond; some examples:

Published an expanded cemetery survey now including Charlottesville, Richmond, and Southwest VA (thanks to local volunteers who collected the information)
Fielded many calls for least expensive cremation choices, less expensive funeral choices, and home funerals
Shared our materials with a business professor at Virginia Tech who requested permission to use them in her class
Received requests for information from a funeral home, a cemetery, several social service

agencies, and hospices
Responded to calls in our service area (Roanoke and New River Valleys) as well as Patrick, Elkton, Charlotte, Hillsboro, Swoope, Louisa, Grayson, Staunton, Petersburg, Fluvana, Pamplin, Harrisonburg, and Richmond
Responded to requests from the entire country – Charlotte, Denver, Los Angeles, Seattle, Lyme, NH, Cleveland, Paramas, NJ, Arizona

Legal advocacy

Monitored the State legislature
Monitored the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers
Appeared before the Blacksburg Cemetery Board to advocate for a green burial section in Westview Cemetery – Board shows no interest
Updated Facebook page weekly

Helped consumers – members and non-members alike; examples:

Provided home visits and personalized information to more than 30 families
Responded to many calls that came in needing money to pay for funerals, gave advice from not claiming the body, doing a home burial, immediate burial with no casket, direct cremation, and body donation to some higher-cost options involving 2 states and 3 cities
Welcomed 13 new members for a total of 352



Looking at the total footprint

One of our members in Floyd, Perrin Heartway, wrote this article as a response to one in our last newsletter. We welcome thoughts from our members and friends. Just send them in.

Reconsider the ecological impact

Consider the ecological impact was published in the spring 2019 fcavbr newsletter. The conclusion was likely drawn by the reader that conventional burial has the greatest negative impact on the environment, followed by traditional cremation, then alkaline hydrolysis (AH), and finally green burial. This article supports that conclusion, but has concerns that AH will be marketed and popularized as the greenest death care option. Consequently, consumers will be led from the environmentally beneficial practice of green burial. In contrast, this article looks at some of the hidden impacts of AH and immeasurable ecological benefits of green burial.

Alkaline hydrolysis (AH), aka water cremation or aquamation is being marketed as the new green alternative to fire cremation. One manufacturer of AH states, "Aquamation is a gentle process that uses water instead of fire to return a body back to mother nature." This is true, if a water treatment facility counts as mother nature.

It is claimed that AH uses around 1/10 the energy of cremation and has about an 85% reduction of carbon

Board of Trustees

2020 Term

Leanne Mitchell

Helen Renqvist

Sandy Schlaudecker

2021 Term

Linda Plaut

Harriett Cooper

Phil Olson

2022 Term

Ben Crawford

Wava Osborne

Dianne Rencsok

Officers

President: Sandy Schlaudecker

Vice president: Phil Olson

Secretary: Linda Plaut

Treasurer: Dianne Rencsok

Isabel Berney, Administrator
(volunteer)

Perrin Heartway comments

This article is not comprehensive. It does not list the hidden costs of green burial or hidden benefits of AH. However, it is the opinion of the author that those lists would be tedious and insignificant in comparison to the lists provided.

As Billy Campbell of Memorial Ecosystems wrote:

"It [AH] is like hauling an RV to the top of a mountain then letting it glide down and claim it is an incredibly energy efficient vehicle. It is the whole process that counts."

footprint. Those numbers may be accurate *at the site of cremation*, but not when considering the **hidden impacts of AH:**

- Requires around 4 gallons of potassium hydroxide (lye) per cremation. This highly alkaline chemical is produced from electrolysis, consuming massive amounts of electricity (chlor-alkali process). This industry consumes billions of kilowatt-hours world-wide, with the average chloralkali plant consuming as much electricity as 30,000 American households.
- Consider the implicit costs of producing that electricity via coal or nuclear power plants.
- Carbon footprint for producing, shipping, and disposal of the lye containers.
- Carbon footprint from manufacturing and shipping a 3000 pound stainless steel AH machine.
- Dedicated climate controlled facility/room to house the machine.
- Walk-in cooler to store bodies in queue to be hydrolyzed.
- Disposal of AH machine, when it becomes outdated or eventually nonfunctional.
- Transportation of the bodies to an AH facility.
- Bodies *may* be embalmed beforehand, leading to increased production, shipping, and exposure to the carcinogen formaldehyde and toxin methanol.
- Dissolvable, heavy duty body bags with zippers or adhesive may be consumed during each body cycle.
- High volume, fast machines use significant amounts of hot water (92 gallons at 300°F) and convection drying ovens.
- Residual bones must be pulverized in a grinder, requiring manufacturing, shipping, electricity, and eventually disposal of a grinding machine.
- Pulverized bones must be packaged, again requiring manufacture and shipping of another container.
- Significant fresh water and waste treatment needed. To dispose of 1,000 pounds of AH remains, approximately 60–240 gallons of water are used, resulting in 120–300 gallons of effluent.

Real cost of AH continued

- Must lower the effluent pH to an acceptable level for many wastewater treatment plants. Often done with carbon dioxide, which carries its own manufacturing, containment, and shipping impacts.

- Technical, specialized death care, such as AH disconnects the grieving survivors from the final transition of the loved one. Disconnection from natural life processes, such as the death of a loved one, likely leads to some degree of an inner sense of emptiness and, consequently, consumption-driven behaviors that demand more resources from our planet.

Although conventional cremation carries similar hidden costs, AH still may be an environmentally friendlier option than it, albeit less than is claimed by its proponents.

There is no question that AH outperforms conventional burial, with its exorbitant resource consumption and non-productive use of land. (Details in the previous spring newsletter).

However, when compared to a **green burial's obvious and hidden benefits**, AH's hidden costs make the green cemetery a clear choice for the health of our planet:

- Serves as a tool for in perpetuity protection of land and healthy ecosystems.
- Native plants are favored, particularly in "conservation burial," contributing to a more balanced and stable ecosystem.
- No formaldehyde, casket, or concrete vault used.
- Likely hand dug graves, reducing use of machines and consumption of fossil fuels.
- The carbon in the human body may be sequestered into trees and microorgan-

isms as opposed to being released into the atmosphere.

- Plants growing in the green cemetery provide "ecosystem services" such as converting greenhouse gases into breathable oxygen.
- Native plants provide ideal habitat for wildlife.
- Minimal natural materials used for the shroud or compostable casket.
- Family, friends, and community can kinesthetically participate in the death care process, such as digging the grave, and holding, preparing, and transporting the body. These rituals are important, yet are mostly lost parts of the grieving process.
- Cemetery serves as a refuge for nature and nature lovers.
- Provides a (potentially public) space for walking, quiet spiritual reflection, and nature/death education.

- Green burial is a grassroots type of non-specialized, accessible death care, that empowers communities and brings a sense of unity and belonging. Healthy, connected, and fulfilled communities seek gratification less in other substitute consumption-driven behaviors, having a gentler, more balanced relationship with the earth.

Green and particularly conservation burial has not just a "less negative" impact, but a significant net positive impact on our natural environment.



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Kroger Community Awards & Amazon Smile

Thanks to our members who have connected their Kroger Loyalty Cards to us. If you have a Kroger Plus card, consider signing up for Kroger Community Awards to give a percentage of your bill as a donation to FCAVBR.

Go online to <https://www.kroger.com>. If you already have a Kroger account, simply login. If not, you will be asked to create one. When asked to select the organization to receive your rewards, enter this number:

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