



Texas Funeral Service Commission Recommendations for Funeral Practitioners during the COVID-19 Outbreak

Our Chapter and the broader FCA organization has always worked from a position that, for consumers, knowledge is power. If you know the rules going into a situation you are better armed to ensure that you are being treated fairly. To that end, following will be several quotes from the current direction that the TFSC has sent to funeral providers in Texas regarding their operation during the current Covid-19 pandemic situation.

The full documents can be read at the Texas Funeral Service Commission's web site (www.tfsc.texas.gov)

Funeral Arrangements Conference

The arrangement conference and document signing is probably the most important piece of the funeral service process; without this component, nothing can be completed. The funeral director is responsible for the health and safety of their guests in their funeral home as well as their staff and their personal families. It is possible to complete the funeral arrangement conference over the phone, through a face to face video chat, or in person. The merchandise selection process will be completed through the same process. The documents that need to be signed can be completed through a service search as Docusign or any other verified digital signature program. If the arrangement conference is completed at the funeral home or family's residence, remember the importance of personal space and social distancing. During the funeral arrangement conference, it is normal and polite to offer condolences through a hand shake or a touch on the shoulder; however, during this current emergency, we need to avoid all personal contact with our grieving families.

After each family has made funeral arrangements, the arrangements office, the merchandise selection room and any other location where the family may have interacted needs to be disinfected appropriately. Funeral home staff members should be assisting guests with their movement around the funeral home in order to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19. There is no limitation to the number of people in the arrangement office, however, the funeral home should use their best judgment as to the room capacity and safe distancing.

Preparation of remains

While we recognize that embalming is not required by law, as per the FTC Funeral Rule, we also should recognize that the embalming process of a COVID-19 case is similar to that of any other respiratory disease condition. If a family wishes to view their loved one, we should encourage embalming. If the family wishes to delay their remains-present funeral service, we should encourage embalming so that the remains can be stored in the appropriate and dignified manner.

The funeral home staff is at low risk of contracting the virus through the exposure to the deceased remains. The funeral home staff should continue to use Universal Precautions during the preparation/embalming process. It is the responsibility of the funeral director to ensure their embalmers have the necessary PPEs for the embalming process and that they are utilizing them correctly. The preparation room should have limited access during all embalming procedures at this time, especially since we do not know who actually has the virus and who does not. The embalmers should be using best practices when preparing all cases during this emergency; taking additional time when embalming, not over manipulating any set of remains, using the appropriate amount and strength of embalming solution, using adequate amount of cavity fluid, packing the mouth and nose with disinfectant saturated cotton. The preparation room should be thoroughly disinfected after each embalming case. These best practices will ensure the safety of the funeral home staff and the grieving families who will be close to the remains.

Viewing/Visitation

The casketed viewing/visitation is a time that the community can come together to share their support with the grieving family. During this pandemic emergency, it is the responsibility of the funeral director to provide a safe and healthy venue and opportunity for a visitation that complies with the federal and state social distancing guidelines. Any room used for this option should be able to accommodate ample space to comply with the social distancing guidelines.

ID Viewing for Cremation/Burial

If a family wishes to complete an identification viewing prior to the immediate disposition of the remains, there can be several different modalities that this can be accomplished.

- *The family may see the remains through a closed circuit video camera. This would allow the family to see their loved one while keeping them at a safe distance from the remains.*

- *The family, in limited number, may physically see the remains in a private room. There should be a funeral home staff member with the family in the private room to assist them, if needed. The family should be reminded not to disturb the remains out of concern of increased exposure to them and the funeral staff. Remember, that the room must be disinfected after this viewing has been completed and the staff should be utilizing proper PPEs when disinfecting the room.*

Open Casket Viewing

If a family requests an open casket viewing or visitation, a veil may be placed over the head cap panel which would allow viewing of the remains while creating a barrier so that the remains are not disturbed.

(Continued on the next page)

Message from the chapter President, Norman Crader

Let me start out by introducing myself. I'm Norman Crader, newly elected President for our local FCA chapter of San Antonio, Texas. I've been Vice President of the board for the past two years and have served on the board of Directors the past three years. Due to our by-laws, Jean Nation had to step down as President and kindly accepted the Vice President position on our board and will be an advisor. Due to the present Covid-19 crisis the board voted to not hold an annual meeting for 2020. Our goal is to hopefully hold an annual meeting at our normal time of March 2021. We are still holding regular board meetings and are able to generate and print a semi-annual newsletter. Due to no annual meeting for 2020 we, as a board, had to vote on two items. Issue number one was electing a new board. The board is as follows: President, Norman Crader, Vice President, Jean Nation, Treasurer, Linda Espino, Secretary, Susan Hartley. Directors are Janice Barsun, Alvin Knoll and Sean Habina. We still need three more volunteers for the board of Directors. If interested please call Norm at 210-842-7821 or Linda at 210-274-8040. The second item the board had to vote on was an addition to our constitution due to becoming a 501c(3) organization per IRS instructions. We as a board voted on the proposal and it passed. So a copy will be available at our next annual meeting. We also will have the funeral survey done and in our next newsletter in February 2021. I hope this newsletter finds you safe and healthy. Best regards, Norman Crader, Chapter President.

Treasurer's Corner, Linda Espino

The year 2020 A.D. - since our last newsletter, so many changes to normalcy, so many challenges to keep moving in positive directions. As your newly appointed Treasurer (last month), I will be actively seeking Jean Nations' and Janice Barsun's brain-power on financial rules and duties as a 501c(3) organization. Under their leadership, the Chapter is financially stable and able to maintain our one-time, life-time membership while continuing to hold costs down.

The major way our finances remain solid is with increasing membership rolls - our goal is 15 per month. During this current COVID-19 pandemic, many things seem to be on-hold and our membership growth is one of those things! Without a 2020 Annual Meeting and many canceled opportunities to do group presentations, we need to focus on talking to others about the FCA and directing them to our website. Thank you for spreading the good word about us. Also, remember we can do quick sign-ups for those needing it.

Since mortuaries are being over-whelmed this year, our plan is to publish a price sheet and survey early next year. In the meantime, our contracted Funeral Caring stands ready to assist you. Please do let us know when a loved one passes and if any of your contact information has changed since you signed on.

TFSC GUIDANCE TO FUNERAL PROVIDERS (Cont.)

Remember, the social distancing guidelines suggest no more than 10 people at any given time gathered together. After the viewing/visitation has concluded, the entire room should be disinfected including all surfaces of the room and the casket/container.

Closed Casket Visitation

If a family wishes to have a closed casket visitation, the casket should remain closed, locked and secured in the visitation room. Remember, the social distancing guidelines suggest no more than 10 people at any given time gathered together. After the viewing/visitation has concluded, the entire room should be disinfected including all surfaces of the room and the casket/container.

Funeral Service Activities

All funeral homes should follow the recommended safe seat spacing guideline of 6 feet between family groups and guests will be seated in every other row in the chapel or place of service. The funeral home areas where the public has interacted should be disinfected in between each service. Each funeral home should also use their best judgment as to the total number of people in the funeral home at any given time; including guests and staff.

There is no occupancy limit or restrictions on a religious service conducted in a church or place of worship, which includes a funeral or memorial service conducted in a church, place of worship or the funeral home or mortuary chapel. Therefore, there is not a limit to the number of people attending the funeral or memorial service. The areas where the public has interacted should be disinfected in between each service. Each funeral home should also use their best judgment as to the total number of people in the funeral home at any given time; this does not include any funeral home staff members.

Out of respect for those individuals at high-risk of infection, a special designated area should be made available for them. This area needs to be disinfected prior to and after each use. It should be reserved only to those who are high risk and their immediate family members.

It is a recommendation that the live streaming accommodations continue to be used during this continued Reopening since there may be high risk guests who cannot attend the services yet have the ability to participate remotely.

Interment Services

Outdoor interment services no longer have a limitation as to the number of people who gather at the interment site. There are no longer any restrictions or requirements that mandate social distancing at an outdoor interment location.

Additional Recommendations

There is no facial covering requirement for the guests or public visitors; however, each funeral home may require their staff to have some type of facial covering. Each funeral establishment can require customers to follow additional hygiene measures when entering their facilities. As a reminder, all funeral home staff is encouraged to practice proper cleanliness and good personal hygiene when working at the funeral home and especially when working with the guests and public.

Financial constraints of the families whom you serve. Many families do not have the financial resources to support two funeral events, separated by time, due to a health crisis, which they had no control over. When a family, whom you previously served, comes to your funeral home to plan a memorial service or event, consider their physical requests for a memorial service, their emotional condition for having to wait an unexpected length of time to have a proper memorial event and lastly consider their financial situation and how the pandemic may have placed a heavier burden on them.

DESIGNING ONLINE FUNERALS

There are many online resources that can be useful in creating meaning and connection in isolation, and more are coming online daily as this crisis evolves and more people are realizing the implications of not being physically present at funeral services.

Creating a Ceremony

Families may or may not be familiar with designing online services, so creating a ceremony using online tools may involve clergy, celebrants, cemeterians, home funeral guides, funeral directors, and others to coordinate in new ways. Here are some resources to assist with ceremony planning:

- The Inspired Funeral (www.theinspiredfuneral.com)
- GatheringUs (www.gatheringus.com)
- Funeral Helper (www.funeralhelper.org)
- Your End of Life Guide (www.yourendoflifeguide.com)
- OregonFuneral.org (www.oregonfuneral.org)

Online Videoconferencing Platforms

Sometimes the only people present during a committal will be the funeral director, sexton, or other cemetery worker. Filming the burial with families and friends witnessing through a videoconferencing tool may be an option. Each platform works essentially the same but some have different restrictions, time availability by plan, and costs. Creating an event online takes planning and coordination, and someone who is capable of operating the equipment at graveside, even if it is simply a smartphone, so that the "attendees" experience the event as close to the real thing as possible. Online funeral services and memorials also require that everyone involved have ready and comfortable access. Here are some platforms that are proven to work well for this purpose:

- Zoom (www.zoom.us)
- Skype (www.skype.com)

You may wish to consider having the burial filmed and the uploaded for a restricted audience later, or livestream to anyone you choose to include using one of these methods:

- Facebook group live streaming
- Vimeo link to uploaded film
- YouTube live-streaming and/or upload

– *The Green Burial Council* www.greenburialcouncil.org

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE CONTINUES

The Chapter continues to recruit new members. Don't stop telling your friends, neighbors and relatives about the benefits of FCA membership. This is more important now than ever to help maintain our chapter's financial health.

BURIAL VAULTS AND GRAVE LINERS

While funeral planning you'll run into a lot of information regarding burial vaults and grave liners. The purpose of a burial vault is to prevent the ground from caving in once it has settled. Burial vaults can vary widely in price, from as little as \$200 to upwards of \$10,000 US. The purchase that most practically fills this need is a concrete grave liner that need not cost any more than \$400.

There are very few states that actually require a liner, though the cemetery and funeral home may not tell you this. Some cemeteries will require you to buy a liner or burial vault in order to keep the costs of maintenance down. This is a fair requirement, as long as they're up front about the fact that it's their own stipulation. If you don't wish to buy a grave liner or burial vault, you can shop around for a cemetery that doesn't require them.

A burial vault, which encases the entire casket, is bigger, stronger and more expensive than a grave liner, and it generally comes with a warranty. Neither kind of burial container will prevent the decay of your loved one's remains; any cemetery or funeral provider that makes this promise, or hints that it is possible, isn't being honest. Burial vaults and liners only protect the casket and keep the ground around it solid.

You should be able to shop around for a burial container. The Federal Funeral Rule requires that funeral homes or cemetery owners provide you with a complete list of prices and descriptions. You are allowed to buy a burial container from third party sellers. If the cemetery tells you that this will cost extra, shop around for a cemetery that will charge less or nothing at all to allow a lower cost burial container to be brought in.

Darryl Roberts is a vocal critic of the funeral industry. He despairs at the industry's attitude toward burial vaults. In his testimony before the Senate, Roberts warned of funeral homes that lead consumers to believe sealed vaults somehow protect the remains of the deceased. He also criticized members of the funeral industry who push expensive burial vaults when much cheaper grave liners will do just as well.

Expensive sealed burial vaults are one of the biggest swindles to be found in the burial industry. Most insiders even admit that they actually create more of a mess than any other containers. They don't allow the remains to properly dry, as they would under normal conditions. There is very little reason to buy a sealed vault in place of a grave liner.

Vaults or liners are necessary because the ground moves and settles as the casket eventually decays. Wood placed into the ground will decay in a matter of months in some climates, and certainly after a few years almost anywhere. Caskets made of more durable material may last longer, but also eventually break down; a vault or liner will keep the ground around the casket sturdy. When funeral planning, approach the subject of burial vaults and grave liners with the knowledge that nothing can prevent a casket from decaying.

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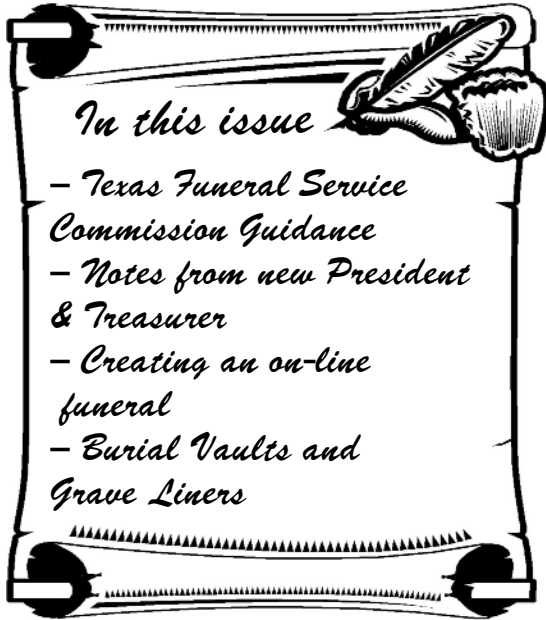


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**Funeral Consumers Alliance
Of San Antonio, Texas**

Established in 1948 as a non-profit consumers, all volunteer service and educational organization, advocating simplicity, dignity and choice in cremation and funeral practices.

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!! IMPORTANT NOTICE !!
OUR CURRENT CONTRACTED FUNERAL PROVIDER, FUNERAL CARING U.S.A., WILL BE CHARGING A \$200 SURCHARGE FOR ALL SERVICES ASSOCIATED WITH AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS DIED AS A RESULT OF AN ILLNESS CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 VIRUS.