

REMOVAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTIES INVOLVED

The “final” resting place for many of our clients’ loved ones is no longer final. For 33 years, I have examined caskets being transferred from in ground burial vaults and mausolea to other cemeteries or above ground mausolea. My conclusion is always the same, change is awesome!

With the trend of families selecting above ground entombment and the resulting growth of above ground mausoleum construction, an increasing number caskets are being removed from in ground burial vaults and transferred to the new mausolea by family members. Acceptable removal responsibilities of the parties involved in the past may not be acceptable today. With today’s technologies and legal responsibilities, it is important to have a procedure in place so everyone knows their duties and roles during the removal operation and obtain the necessary documentation to assure a smooth transfer.

In order to complete a successful in ground removal today, you should have a procedure that lists the removal responsibilities of the parties involved. This document should include the Pre-Transfer and Transfer Day responsibilities of the Cemetery, Funeral Director, Burial Vault Company and Family. Initiated by the Cemetery, there should be a place for each item to be checked off and either signed or initialed. File copies should be kept by the Funeral Director and Burial Vault Company.

I’ve been a part of the best practices of cemeteries and funeral directors for the transfer of remains. The sample procedure that follows is what works best to facilitate the removal and transfer in a cemetery setting. The procedure can be used for in ground to above ground entombments. It can be amended to apply to in ground to in ground internments or transfers between cemeteries.

Sample Procedure for in ground transfer to mausoleum entombment

PRE-TRANSFER

CEMETERY RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Family to verify grave location, section, row, lot and grave number of deceased to be transferred.
- Signed authorization forms by responsible next of kin noting removal location and transfer location.
- Payment of all cemetery fees by the responsible party.

- Scheduling of transfer and notification to the funeral director and the burial vault company.
- Obtaining materials needed for the protection of workers (see list below).

FUNERAL DIRECTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Funeral Director will explain to the family the removal policies and procedures.
- The Funeral Director will explain to the family that a replacement casket may be required. If a replacement casket is required, the cost for the replacement casket and disposal of the existing casket will be the responsibility of the family.
- Notification of intent to remove casket to appropriate cemetery unless previously contacted by the family.
- Payment of all funeral home fees and expenses by the appropriate party.
- The Funeral Director will obtain the dis-interment/ re-interment permit.
- The Funeral Director will obtain a court order for the transfer of the remains. Should a replacement casket be needed, the court order permits the in ground removal to proceed without delay.

TRANSFER DAY

FUNERAL DIRECTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Funeral director and employees are required to wear personal protective clothing. Should employees not have personal protective clothing; the clothing will be provided by the cemetery and charged to funeral director. Typical cost of a suit of protective clothing is \$ 15.00 per worker.
- The Funeral Director will have a replacement casket on site for use if necessary.
- The Funeral Director and assistant must be present before the burial vault company can remove the vault from the ground and sign the attendance sheet.
- The Funeral Director will present the proper permits and court order before the removal can proceed.
- The Funeral Director and assistant will assist with the removal of the casket from the burial vault. Should a replacement casket be required, it will be the responsibility of the licensed Funeral Director and his assistant to transfer the remains to the replacement casket.
- The Funeral Director and his assistant will properly prepare the used casket for removal from the cemetery. The removal of the casket for disposal must be completed in a timely fashion at the direction of the Funeral Director.
- The Funeral Director will remain at the cemetery until the casket has been entombed in the mausoleum, the plastic shutter has been caulked in place and the crypt front properly secured.

CEMETERY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Grave will be opened by cemetery employees after all employees have signed the attendance sheet.

- Once the casket is removed from the burial vault, designated cemetery superintendent will determine if the casket is acceptable for transfer or if a replacement casket is required.
- The casket should be sealed in an acceptable outer unit designed for the containment of fluids and decomposition odors.
- The casket will be transferred by cemetery employees to the mausoleum.
- The entombment will be made by cemetery employees.
- The plastic shutter will be sealed in place and the crypt front secured by cemetery employees.

BURIAL VAULT COMPANY RESPONSIBILITIES

- All Burial Vault Company employees need to sign the attendance sheet.
- Burial Vault Company employees are required to wear personal protective clothing. Should employees not have personal protective clothing; the clothing will be provided by the cemetery and charged to the burial vault company. Typical cost of a suit of protective clothing is \$ 15.00 per worker.
- Burial Vault employees cannot begin to remove the burial vault until directed by the cemetery superintendent.
- The burial vault will be removed from the grave and opened at a location determined by the cemetery superintendent.
- The casket must be removed from the burial vault by the employees of the vault company for inspection by the cemetery superintendent.
- The used burial vault must be replaced on the vault truck, covered and then disposed of by the burial vault company. There should be no bodily fluids leaking from the burial vault. (Encapsulate fluids in vault before transfer.)

* MATERIALS PROVIDED BY THE CEMETERY FOR REMOVALS

As indicated in the procedure above, the cemetery needs to have the following materials on hand for a safe and effective transfer:

- 8 sets of personal protective clothing for cemetery employees, funeral director and employees and burial vault company employees including suits, disposable gloves and filter masks.
- 4 rolls of black plastic sheeting (10'x 25'/ 3-4 mil.) to protect the ground and/or to wrap the used casket for removal from cemetery.
- Sawzall to cut the bolts on lid of a metal casket and electrical connection for power access.
- Four sided tent for privacy.
- An acceptable outer casket unit designed for containment of fluids and decomposition odors.
- Absorb-a-Gel encapsulate powder which prevents the splashing of fluids in bottom of casket and burial vault.
- Duct tape, deodorizer spray and first aid kit.

The entire in ground removal transfer day process should be documented in writing and with pictures. Complete an attendance sheet, listing all who are present, their addresses, area code and telephone numbers and the party they represent. This documentation should be placed in a secure file for future reference.

With the increase in the number of in ground transfers to the Mausoleum, the time to implement the Removal Responsibilities of the Parties Involved is now. By providing a specific and detailed list of party responsibilities, you will experience a professional, timely and successful transfer for all parties involved, especially the families we serve.

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