

Joint Guidance on Government Advice for Cemeteries and Crematoria, 18 March 2020

Funeral Services at Crematoria and Cemeteries

There is currently no ban on gatherings, so funerals can still take place. Where funeral ceremonies are to take place in a chapel, families should be advised to consider restricting attendance to close family and friends only so as to minimise the number of people in a relatively small space. Families should also be advised to follow the Government's advice to stay at home for 14 days if they show symptoms or live with somebody who is showing symptoms. Those over 70, with an underlying health problem, or pregnant women are particularly encouraged to heed this advice. This may mean that they may have to miss the funeral, or hold the funeral, or have a memorial service at a later date. Alternatively, at those crematoria that offer the service, people could watch the funeral online via webcasting, either at the time of the funeral or at a later date. Crematoria are encouraged to make this service free wherever possible during the virus outbreak.

A risk based approach to attendance at a funeral is encouraged, based on government advice about gatherings, and those most vulnerable to the virus. Things to consider are:

- the age profile of the deceased and mourners
- the type of funeral service requested
- the number of mourners
- your ability to carry it out safely and within the government's guidelines

You are advised to work closely with the funeral director to make the assessment.

For Cemetery and Crematorium Teams

Mourners should be encouraged to stay in their cars or wait outside and not meet in the waiting room. They should not enter the chapel until asked to do so by the chapel attendant or funeral director.

Hand shaking with ministers, celebrants, funeral directors, mourners etc is discouraged.

Wherever possible cemetery and crematorium teams should open and close the chapel doors, thereby restricting the number of people touching the handles.

If a large group of mourners attends a funeral, they should be seated, wherever possible, so that groups are a respectful distance away from each other.

For services in a chapel, you may wish to consider removing the service books and asking that service sheets are provided for each service. This is because it may be difficult to clean each service book between services. If service sheets are provided, the mourners should take them with them, or they should place them into a suitable receptacle as they leave the chapel. This will minimise handling by crematorium and cemetery teams.

In between services, the hard surfaces in the chapel should be wiped down with a suitable cleaning equipment. This should include chair tops, pews, door handles, catafalque top etc. Public toilets should be cleaned more regularly than usual, and soap dispensers kept topped up. Teams should wear suitable PPE when carrying out any cleaning duties, and any waste should be handled carefully and double bagged before disposal. Consideration should be given to shortening the time for a funeral service to allow sufficient time between each service for the chapel to be cleaned.

Hand sanitisers, gloves and tissues should be made available to all mourners and funeral directors before they enter the chapel. Suitable receptacles for placing these into after use should also be provided.

If you provide a bearer service, you may wish to consider this on a case by case basis using a risk based approach during the outbreak. Use of a wheeled bier should be encouraged wherever possible to prevent bearers being too close together.

There is no requirement to insist on curtains being closed following the committal of the coffin and the wishes of the family should be taken into account. However, it may be wise to discourage mourners from touching the coffin as they leave the chapel for the time being. They could be encouraged to wave or blow a kiss instead.

The number of people allowed to witness the charging of a coffin into the cremator may need to be restricted to avoid close contact.

Administration

Consideration should be given to closing the office to members of the public at the current time. All staff need to be protected from exposure to the virus wherever possible so that they can stay healthy as long as possible to continue providing the service.

Consideration should be given to focussing on the core functions of burial and cremation during the peak of the outbreak, with additional services such as providing memorials or carrying out family history searches suspended until resources allow.

Funeral directors should be encouraged to minimise the number of staff visiting cemetery and crematorium offices. Forms should be dropped off by posting through letterboxes rather than taken into the office. This means that forms won't be signed for, so funeral directors are encouraged to confirm by phone or email that the forms have been delivered and check they have been received. The use of electronic forms should be encouraged as much as possible.

Funeral directors should not be encouraged to sign Cremation Form 1 on behalf of families. Should this be considered necessary by the funeral director, cremation authorities should consult with their medical referee on a case by case basis.

Consideration should be given to the release of ashes; it may be necessary to arrange for specific times when they can be collected, ideally by one person to minimise unnecessary contact. Consideration may need to be given to longer-term storage of ashes in suitably secure conditions.

Consideration should be given to suspending witnessed scattering services for the time-being.

Consideration should be given to suspending family back-filling of graves for the time-being.

Cremation and burial numbers

An important factor to consider is the maximum number of cremations/burials that your site(s) could provide per day and for what period. For cremations, cremator manufacturers have suggested around 10 cremations per cremator per 24 hour period would be attainable if required. For burials, capacity will depend on many factors and authorities are encouraged to consider what would be attainable in their sites. Consideration could be given to the pre-digging of graves, but these must be properly shored and protected with lockable grave covers.

Authorities should ensure that other staff are suitably trained in order to provide support to key crematorium and cemetery staff.

We would also urge you to think about any particular local issues which could prevent you from being able to deliver your service, and would welcome feedback on these issues.

Operating Cremators during Pandemic situations

Facultatieve Technologies (FT) whose UK base is in Leeds and whose equipment is installed in some 80% of all UK crematoria, have kindly developed the operational guidance below for Pandemic situations and given their permission for it to be circulated to appropriate public and private organisations within the Death Care sector:

Cremators can operate for extended periods and do so regularly and successfully in our own crematoria in Germany, but we ask site operators to inform us if they are extending their operating hours so we can help them monitor and manage the situation.

If you need to operate for extended periods i.e., 18-20 hours for a few weeks then there is no requirement for any particular changes to the operating procedures or servicing regimes. However, if due to demand, you needed to operate for 24 hours a day for weeks and months then there are some considerations which should be addressed. The Filtration system needs to blow down the Compact Coolers (Boilers) and Filters once per day, so stopping for 1 hour will be needed. Where cremators have operated at such intensity for prolonged periods additional major services have been required so instead of every six months, a service every three or four months may be needed.

To achieve higher numbers of cremations during a 24 hour period, the use of side and top air instead of the primary burner, will certainly assist in completing the charge quicker and more importantly cooling the chamber in readiness for the next cremation as the heat stored in the cremator will gradually increase.

Close attention should be paid to the Factivate feeder to ensure it has supplies of Factivate (re-agent for the abatement plant) and also to the waste collection drums to ensure they do not overfill during such busy periods. Factivate is a blended chemical reagent used for the abatement of mercury and dioxin in the abatement plant during each cremation at a pre-determined rate and frequency and its consumption will significantly increase during extended running of the crematorium.

There is a Cremation Planning Calculator (click the Calculator icon on the top right of any operating control screens) which will assist you when planning work for these periods and any other times.

As the Coronavirus has developed into a pandemic FT have implemented a number of actions to provide sufficient manpower to deal with the increased levels of breakdowns, including suspending servicing or carrying out partial 'Hot' servicing or attending breakdowns only, to meet whatever levels of demand we are presented with.

FT have significantly increased our stockholding of parts already over past months during the run up to proposed Brexit dates, so we feel we are operating with sufficient stocks in place. If, however, customers tried purchasing much larger quantities in advance, then this may cause a problem and we may need to adjust orders to prevent a runaway situation.

Staffing

Consideration needs to be given to protecting the health of qualified cremator operators and grave diggers for as long as possible. For cremator operators this may mean that they work solely in the crematory to avoid coming into contact with groups of people.

Consideration should be given to training other staff, either from within the service or outside if necessary, so that they can work alongside qualified operators. Shift systems may be required, so consideration should be given to placing trainee operatives with a qualified operative on an opposing shift to other qualified operators to prevent cross-contamination and ensure as many qualified operators remain well for as long as possible.

Cremators should only be operated by qualified operators or those working under their supervision. There are no proposals at the current time to relax this requirement.

Gravediggers should be suitably qualified. Non-qualified gravediggers should work under the supervision of a qualified operative.

The ICCM and FBCA both provide training courses for cremator operators and cemetery operatives and can provide advice on what training is required.

Care should be taken by authorities and companies to protect the physical and mental wellbeing of all employees during difficult and possibly long working hours.

Please be aware that the situation is ever evolving and guidance may need to be updated in line with Government guidance as and when it is issued.

