

Step-by-Step Do-It-Yourself Funeral

Do what you can BEFORE a death:

NOTE on Embalming (which requires a licensed provider): Embalming is mandated when a body crosses state lines from Alabama, Minnesota, or Nebraska. New Jersey requires embalming if the body is shipped by common carrier. Several other states require either embalming *or* a sealed casket if the body is shipped by common carrier. However, this is rarely enforced and funeral homes in those states will routinely ship unembalmed bodies (for Jewish clients, for example). Deaths **occurring in** AL, CT, IL, IN, IA, LA, MI NE, NJ, NY will require the involvement of a funeral director on some level (such as simply their presence or filing paperwork).

- 1) Designate a **family member or friend** to act as the Dispositioner. The Dispositioner files for a death certificate and Medical Examiner's permit, and drives the vehicle that will bring the body to a place of final disposition (cemetery or crematory). Step 9 has a link to a free downloadable manual containing a list of 18 task/roles you can assign friends and family.
- 2) **Call the office of Vital Records** in the county where the death will most likely occur. Let the Registrar there know that the family plans to file for a Death Certificate themselves (so the office is prepared for a possible weekend/afterhours filing). Go to the State website <https://vitalrecords.utah.gov/> Then select "File a Death Record" to print out a form that helps you gather the information for the death certificate that the registrar will need.
- 3) Find a **casket**: Build one, buy one or delegate someone else to do so.
- 4) **Call a cemetery** or crematory to let them know family will be acting as the Dispositioner. They should inform you of any cemetery rules you must comply with. If you prefer burial in a **non-commercial cemetery**, get permission from a contact person for that cemetery. For a list of rural cemeteries in Utah go to <https://heritage.utah.gov/history/cemeteries>, click on "cemeteries & Burials". If you prefer burial on **your own private rural property** there are no Utah State regulations. For more details download the **Utah chapter** of laws at www.Funerals.org, click on "Bookstore" or email Joyceinutah@gmail.com for some guidelines.
- 5) Veterans who desire a Casket Flag may fill out form 27-2008: at www.cem.va.gov/bbene/bflags.asp. (Then after death bring it to the post office to receive the flag.) Honorably discharged veterans get free burial at a Veterans National Cemeteries which includes grave, vault, opening and closing, marker, and setting fee. More info: www.cem.va.gov
- 6) If a program is desired for a Funeral or Memorial service you can write it beforehand (leaving the date of death blank)

To do AFTER the death:

- 7) **When an Unexpected death occurs: call emergency law enforcement. If you are not sure if the person is dead call 911 for an ambulance.**
When an Expected Death occurs: at home is the best situation- Call the Hospice you are working with or the attending physician if seen within 30 days, otherwise call the non-emergency phone # of your local law enforcement agency.

Hospital death: Let the Doctor and nurses know asap (even before death) that you will NOT be using a funeral director. You will need to get the Death Certificate and others permits at the Health Dept, office of vital records in the county where death occurred BEFORE moving the body.

- 8) **Call the office of Vital Records** in the county where the death occurred. Let the Registrar know that the family plans to file for a Death Certificate themselves. Go to the State website <https://vitalrecords.utah.gov/> to print out a form that helps you gather the information for the death certificate that the registrar will need. (See step 10 for further steps with the Registrar)
- 9) **Prepare the body** for casketing: Treat it with the same modesty as you would any ill person who is bed-ridden. A booklet on how to ease carrying of the body, preventing seepage of body fluids and other logistics are on this website: <http://homefuneralalliance.org/resources/for-families/> and here: <http://www.crossings.net/resources.html> In the first paragraph follow the link “**to view a free summary document on home funeral care.**”
- In reading those primers remember you don’t have to do those items you find uncomfortable or you can alter them to fit your need.

Within a couple hours of death there are marked signs of stiffening of the body, called rigor mortis. So you want to close the eyes, mouth, dress the body if desired and decide where the hands will be within the 1st couple hrs. After 24 hrs the muscles begin to relax again, which is a sign of decomposition. Keeping the body cool slows down all of these processes.

- You may need 16 lbs **per day** of dry ice to keep an average adult at about 40 degrees. Dry ice is purchased at most grocery stores. Using thick gloves, wrap the dry ice in a **paper bag** then **cloth** and place under the body... The room must be ventilated because of the carbon dioxide dry ice releases. When the temp outside is below 40 degrees, an open window in a separate room may substitute for dry ice.

- 10) **File** for a Death Certificate at the Vital Records office of **the health department** of the county where death occurred. Bring with you:
- 1) The worksheet you filled out at <https://vitalrecords.utah.gov/>
 - 2) i.d. (of the person filing the paperwork –aka “Dispositioner”)
 - 3) The ability to pay \$100-\$400 (**Death Certificate data entry fee**: most counties \$100 during business hrs (Utah county charges according to how long it takes the registrar to enter the data or \$75, a couple counties don’t charge extra (most counties charge \$300 for weekend/holiday service), **Medical Examiners permit (includes a transit permit)**: \$107, **1st death certificate**: \$18, **Extra copies** of the Death Cert: \$8).
 - 4) TIME (to get the doctors’ signature): Give the doctor a heads up and the dispositioners cell phone # in case the dr will call to tell you where he/she is. Hopefully the Doctor is on EDEN (Utah’s Electronic Death Entry Network so he/she can sign it electronically instead of you going to get the signature and then going back to Vital Records).
- You will want the death certificate much sooner than the legal 5 days because though a funeral director can **transport** the body or arrange **publication of an obituary**, you, without the D.C. and M.E.’s permit in hand, cannot do those things.

Some have been disappointed with the slow pace when they entrust filing the death certificate to Hospice or a funeral director, so enlist your most determined family member instead of the tempting offers of well-meaning professionals.

11) **Talk to clergy/Secure venues** for:

- For a viewing (the body is visible), for a visitation the body is not visible (i.e. closed casket/or body not present),
- A ceremony: It's called a Funeral if body is present, It's called a memorial when body is not present.
- Final disposition (burial or cremation). Notify **cemetery or crematory** as far ahead as possible.

12) By now you may have received the Death Certificate and Burial Transit Permit needed to move the body. A **van** (with back seats down) or **pick-up truck**, or even an SUV are ideal options for transporting a body in a casket.

13) If an **obituary** is desired then finalize it and bring it to the newspaper with the death certificate. Obituaries are expensive. A typical length runs between \$400 to \$1000. A death notice should be free. Online obit is an inexpensive option such as http://utahobits.tributes.com/obituary/create_options?nav=1

14) **Delegate someone to notify others** of the finalized place and time of meeting & disposition.

15) Finalize the Funeral **Program** and have it printed.

16) Transport to the place of ceremony, entering in the widest doors possible for pallbearers. Place a cloth covered table for the casket to rest on (consider weight of casket when choosing a table). You don't need a casket dolly to move the casket around the building (but small doorways could be awkward). Let the pall bearers work. If they carried the casket from the home to a vehicle then they've had practice

How to **Pre-plan** a Funeral

1) Fill out a Funeral Planning Form (www.utahfunerals.org Click on "Plan Ahead").

2) Figure the cost and how to pay for the funeral (if saving long term then we recommend a dedicated savings account payable to a beneficiary so they will have money to carry out funeral plans at the time of death). Waiting for a Will to be read is too late.

3) Talk to your family. Answer their questions. Your example in speaking comfortably about death will make it easier for them to communicate with each other and work together after death occurs. If they don't agree with you or each other then assign an Agent to Control Disposition. This is a method to allow one person to be in charge of after-deathcare.

4) Give copies of your funeral plan (and instructions such as this document) to all "Next of Kin" and chosen Dispositioner.