

Where can I get additional information?

**Caring for the Dead:
Your Final Act of Love**

This book by Lisa Carlson is subtitled *A complete guide for those making funeral arrangements with or without a funeral director*. Copies are available through FCA at www.funerals.org.

A Family Undertaking

A documentary on home funerals that was first broadcast on SCETV in 2005. Available on DVD from FCA at www.funerals.org.

Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial. (New York: Scribner, 2007)

This excellent book by Mark Harris is available at a discount from FCA.

Final Passages

A website devoted to “green and loving family-directed home funerals.”

www.finalpassages.org

Crossings

“Caring for our own at death: renewing simplicity and sanctity at the transition time of death.”

www.crossings.net

Funeral Consumers Alliance of South Carolina

(Dedicated to consumer choice in making dignified, meaningful, and affordable funeral arrangements.)

2701 Heyward Street
Columbia, SC 29205
803.772.7054
1.800.418.4506 (toll free)
www.funerals.org/fcasc

Funeral Consumers Alliance, Inc.

(A Federation of Non-profit Funeral Information Societies.)

33 Patchen Road
South Burlington, VT 05403
802.865.2626
www.funerals.org



Funeral Consumers Alliance of South Carolina

**Caring For Your Own Dead
in South Carolina**

*A Guide for Helping Families Find
Their Way Through the Funeral Maze*

Why would anyone want to do this?

Some may wish to do this because it seems more fitting and personal for them to care for their own dead rather than turning the body over to a funeral home. Other than embalming, which is never required by law, there is nothing that a funeral director can do that anyone *acting as such* cannot do for themselves. For most of our history the family took the responsibility for caring for their own dead. Over recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in reclaiming this practice.

Another reason may be financial. The average cost of a funeral, not including any cemetery costs, is now more than \$6,500. With caskets readily available on the internet—or by building one yourself—it is possible to provide a meaningful and dignified funeral for a fraction of that price.

Is it legal?

There is nothing in the South Carolina Code (laws) that requires the use of a funeral director. The situation is governed by the Code of Regulations 61-19.

If you act as the funeral director, you must complete and file a death certificate within five days of the death with the registrar of the county in which the death occurred. You will fill out the biographical details, and you'll need to get the signature of the attending physician or family physician, if any. If not, you'll need the death certified by the county coroner.

In order to transport a dead body it is necessary to obtain a Burial-Removal-Transit (BRT) permit which, according to Section 23 of the Regulations "...shall be issued by a *subregistrar* or the coroner in the county in which death occurred."

The county coroner is legally required to review all deaths if a person dies 1) as a result of violence; 2) as a result of apparent homicide; 3) when in apparent good health; 4) when unattended by a physician; 5) in any suspicious or unusual manner; 6) while an inmate of a penal or correctional institution; or, 7) as a result of stillbirth when unattended by a physician.

The county coroner is authorized to issue a BRT permit to the person or persons authorized to handle the final disposition. Some hospitals may have a policy of referring all such requests to the coroner regardless of the circumstances under which the death occurred.

Most deaths that would typically occur in a hospital or under hospice care—whether at home or in a hospice facility—would *not* be coroner's cases, but (at least in some counties) coroners expect them to be *reported*. It's best to check with the coroner's office in advance if possible. Some hospices have been designated by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) as *subregistrars* and can issue a BRT permit. Some coroners may also be willing to issue permits in such instances.

What barriers may be confronted?

If one is interested in caring for their own dead it's important to plan ahead. While the practice is legal in almost every state in the country, it's still relatively rare and you may encounter barriers—some because of ignorance and others of intent.

While doing the research for this brochure we learned that "some" hospitals will release a body **only** to a funeral director or his/her removal service. While this is a violation of the law, it can be a daunting barrier for most families.

So, too, with some coroners. Because in some South Carolina counties the coroner may also be a funeral director, s/he may be unwilling to cooperate with a request to bypass services in which they or other funeral directors have a financial interest.

Because of such concerns it is highly advisable to *make one's wishes known as far in advance of death as possible*. If you

encounter problems such as this and there is time to intervene, the Funeral Consumers Alliance—either the SC affiliate or the national office—may be able to assist you. We would certainly like to be notified. The information for contacting FCA or FCASC is found on the back of this brochure.

Unless and until hospitals become more accustomed to handling such requests, you are likely to be met with confused or otherwise uncooperative staff.

How can the body be transported?

Once arrangements have been made with either the cemetery or the crematory, the body can be placed into a suitable container and loaded into a SUV, van, or truck. Most crematories require that the body arrive in a casket or alternative container so that their staff need not handle the body directly.

Most cemeteries may require an outer burial container (vault), but it may be possible to negotiate exceptions to this. Again, the key to all of this is making sure that you have planned well in advance.

