



Arranging a Funeral or Cremation in California

This article aims to provide some general guidance on how to arrange a funeral or cremation in California. It provides some tips on Californian funeral legislation, some key questions you may be considering if you are planning a funeral or cremation, and an overview of cremation costs.

Choosing a funeral home in California

One of the first things many families turn to do when a death occurs is choose a funeral services provider to handle the services. There are in the region of 1,200 funeral homes throughout California, so deciding upon which funeral home to select can be a pretty daunting task to do. It can help you to formulate some clear criteria for what you want from a funeral director before you start contacting any mortuaries. Do you require a burial or cremation? Do you want traditional or contemporary services? Are you planning ceremony services at the funeral home and therefore require a suitable venue/location? What budget do you have for funeral expenses? Just these few questions can help present a clearer idea of what kind of funeral services provider you need.

If you need to find a funeral home in California, you can use our funeral home directory, which lists funeral homes by city.

What is the average cost of a cremation in California?

California is one of the states where the cremation rate is higher [7 out of 10 Californians choose cremation], this generally means that you can arrange a cremation at a lesser cost than in many other states. California is one of only 2 states where 'direct disposers' are licensed.

If the cost of a cremation is important to you then you may wish to check with DFS Memorials. This is a network of family-owned low cost funeral and cremation providers, with several locations throughout California, who all offer affordable prices for a direct cremation and/or a traditional funeral.

By law funeral establishments MUST quote prices over the telephone, and provide you with a General Price List (GPL) when you make an inquiry.

DFS Memorials Affordable Cremation Providers

Greater Los Angeles area. Cremation cost from \$625. Call (323) 798-9055

Greater San Diego area. Cremation cost from \$700. Call (619) 268-1962

Bay Area. Cremation cost from \$850. Call (415) 286-9121

Greater Sacramento area. Cremation cost from \$795. Call (916) 229-6142

Cremation Services in California – laws that govern cremation & what you need to know

Cremation services are available from most funeral homes in California. The average cost of a cremation can vary quite significantly though, so it is important to compare cremation prices, and ensure you are comparing like for like. For example the cost of a basic cremation in Los Angeles can range between \$625 and \$3,000.

No casket is required by law for a cremation but a suitable rigid cremation container is required. This can be a simple cardboard container. If a service is to be held before the cremation, some funeral homes offer rental caskets. The next of kin must sign the Declaration for Disposition of Cremated Remains, and a funeral home will usually arrange this as part of their services. Most states have a mandatory wait time (24-48 hours) after death before a cremation can proceed. However, the County Medical Examiner or a Justice of the Peace can waive this requirement

Who has the legal responsibility for making funeral arrangements?

California statute states that an agent under a power of attorney, a spouse or registered domestic partner, any adult children, parents, adult siblings or other surviving competent adult kin have the right to make decisions about disposition arrangements after an individual's death unless other written instructions are left.

Arranging a direct cremation in California

As California direct cremation services are popular, and the state licenses direct disposition, a complete direct cremation can be obtained at a very competitive price. Do be sure to check around and make sure any direct cremation prices quoted include the same service/products. There is something of a 'price-war' on direct cremation in California but some cremation providers may not include all costs in an advertised direct cremation package. Be sure to check the price includes the cremation container and crematory fee.

The fees for the cremation permit and death certificate are often additional 'cash advance' or cash disbursements.

What is the average cost of a traditional funeral?

Funeral costs do vary considerably. The cost of a funeral can differ between different providers for the exact same service, and many funeral homes refrain from disclosing prices because they claim that funerals are not "cookie-cutter". The NFDA (2019) surveyed the average cost of a funeral at \$7,640 and this was without cemetery costs. Therefore, it is fair to say that the average traditional burial costs in the region of \$10,000. Now, of course, there are much more inexpensive burial options and this is where it is important to ensure you shop around and make inquiries from at least 3 funeral homes.

Arranging a traditional burial in California

Californian law does not require vaults or grave liners. Many cemeteries may have their own policies requiring them as they keep the ground from settling after burial and make mowing and maintenance easier. A vault completely surrounds the funeral casket in concrete or other material, whereas grave liners cover only the top and sides. Neither is designed to prevent the eventual decomposition of human remains. Many cemeteries also have their own regulations governing the erection of grave markers, so it is wise to fully check cemetery regulation before committing to any vault, grave liner or grave marker purchases.

Can I conduct a home funeral in California?

Yes. The law does permit for you to prepare the body of your loved one for disposition. If you choose to do this, you have to file a completed certificate of death that has been signed by the attending physician or coroner with the local registrar of births and deaths. In addition you must obtain a permit for disposition from the local registrar of births and death, and ensure you provide a casket or suitable container. You would then need to make arrangements directly with the cemetery or crematory for interment or cremation. Human remains may be kept at home until disposition without embalming or refrigeration. Although you must bear in mind that decomposition will proceed more rapidly without refrigeration or embalming.

Is embalming required by law in California?

Californian law states that embalming is not required. However, a funeral establishment must refrigerate an un-embalmed body in its possession within 24 hours if disposition by burial or cremation does not otherwise take place. You may wish to authorize embalming if there will be a delay before a public viewing period, however, you need to realize that embalming does not prevent decomposition.

Purchasing a casket in California

California law permits casket sellers to sell caskets direct to the public. You do not have to purchase your casket directly from a funeral home, but can purchase one from a casket seller and have it delivered to your funeral home. They MUST accept it, and cannot add a service

charge for this. The law does require that casket sellers MUST disclose prices at the onset of any discussion about purchasing a casket.

Casket retailers are not bound by the same laws that govern funeral homes. It is advisable to ensure that you are dealing with a reputable casket supplier. You can often save a significant amount of money by buying a casket direct from a casket retailer, and most can arrange a next-day delivery to your chosen funeral home if required.

[Purchasing a grave marker in California](#)

Similarly a grave marker does not have to be purchased at the time of interment. Generally cemeteries will not permit a memorial marker to be erected until a few months after the burial. This gives the ground a chance to settle and prevents potential subsidence of the monument. Therefore, this gives you time to shop around without feeling you have to commit to a marker whilst making funeral arrangements.

Check out our [‘Caskets’](#) and [‘Grave Markers’](#) sections for much more detailed overview of purchasing these items.

[What can I do with the cremated remains? Laws for scattering ashes in California](#)

In California, you may choose any of the following methods of disposition of cremated remains:

- Placement in a columbarium
- Burial in a plot in a cemetery
- Retention at a residence - The funeral establishment or crematory will have you sign the Permit for Disposition showing that the remains were released to you and will file it with the local registrar of births and deaths. You may not remove the cremated remains from the container and you must arrange for their disposition upon your death
- Storing in a house of worship or religious shrine dependent upon local zoning laws
- Ash Scattering in areas of the state where no local prohibition exists and with written permission of the property owner or governing agency. The cremated remains must be removed from the container and scattered in a manner so they are not distinguishable to the public
- Ash Scattering in a cemetery scattering garden
- Ash Scattering at sea, at least 500 yards from shore

In California cremated remains cannot be transported without a permit from the county health department and they may not be disposed of in refuse.

[How do I obtain a death certificate in California?](#)

The State Registrar of California Office of Vital Records (OVR) registers all deaths. The fee for a death certificate in California is currently \$14.00. You may require more than one death certificate, as you will need to send them off to more than one institution, organization or government office at the same time. Most authority bodies that need evidence of the death, i.e. a life insurance company, will require an original copy of a death certificate. Certified copies of a death certificate are usually available within 10 days after the death.

[Transporting mortal remains from California to another state or country](#)

If a death has occurred and you need to arrange to transport your loved one’s body back to a country of origin for burial, then you will need the services of a funeral home in California familiar with funeral shipping. Transporting a body within the U.S is relatively straightforward but international mortuary shipping is quite specialized. There are funeral homes that are especially versant with the processes for shipping a Mexican national back to their state in Mexico. Read our [funeral shipping](#) page for more information.

[Can I donate my body to science in California?](#)

Yes, you can. You can donate via a local medical school or with a national body donation program. Visit our [Body Donation](#) page to read further about this option.

Hispanic Funerals in California

California has the highest concentration of Hispanic population, mainly immigrants from Mexico. Although many Hispanics and Latinos choose to repatriate remains, the rapidly growing Hispanic-American population in California places a significant emphasis on "memorialization." What this means is that Hispanics are more likely to spend money on a funeral as part of the tradition ingrained within their culture. This has meant that a number of Hispanic mortuaries operate in California.

The deceased had no life insurance and I can't afford a funeral. What help is there with cremation costs in California?

Sadly more families are finding themselves in such a situation. The reality is that there is very limited public or state assistance for funeral costs. The state takes care of any indigent deaths (as is their responsibility) but this is done by the means of a pauper burial or cremation. Social Security offer a \$255 death benefit payment (if qualifying) and the funeral director will assist you with claiming this. For some further guidance read our article ['What do I do if I Can't Afford a Funeral'?](#)

What steps do I need to take when a death has occurred?

If you are choosing to use the services of a funeral director, you need to select a funeral services provider to work with. He/she will be able to help walk you through the next steps once they have the deceased in their care. Visit our article on ['How to Save Money Arranging a Funeral or Cremation'](#) for detailed tips to save money and checklists to help you make preparations.

What should I do if I have a complaint against a funeral home?

If you should have reason to be dissatisfied with the services of a licensed funeral home you can make a formal complaint to the California Department of Consumer Affairs Cemetery and Funeral Bureau. 1625 North Market Blvd, Suite S208, Sacramento, CA 95834 Phone: (916) 574-7870

Hopefully, this basic guide to arranging a funeral or cremation in California has answered some of your questions. Please use our Library / Info section to access further funeral resources. If you have a question, or need assistance, please contact us or use the live chat facility to speak with an advisor.

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