

Originator:	Marie Gorinski
Contact person for queries:	Marie Gorinski/Pat Mitchell
Approved by:	Council
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Wanganui District Council

Natural Burial Policy

This Policy may be cited as Wanganui District Council “Natural Burial Policy”.

Purpose:

The purpose of this Natural Burials Policy is to provide an alternative way of laying people to rest in an environmentally friendly way.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the Natural Burial Policy are:

1. To provide people with the choice of an alternative burial type;
2. To reduce the impact of burial and cremations on the environment;
3. To maintain the quality of the natural environment;
4. To achieve rapid and real return of the body to the earth;
5. To provide a more affordable alternative to conventional burial;
6. To ensure low ongoing maintenance requirements.

1. GOAL– To provide people with the choice of an alternative burial.

Objective

The deceased is lowered into a shroud or casket made of untreated sustainably grown wood. Their unembalmed body will quickly return its nutrients to the earth. The family fills in the plot with warm rich soil and a native tree or flora is planted over the site

2. GOAL - To reduce the impact of burial and cremations on the environment

Objective

There is no embalming of the body; rapid biodegradable non-pollutant caskets are used, or natural fibre burial shrouds, and areas are planted with trees or other flora. Bodies are buried in the active soil layers, rather than the conventional 1.8m depth. The shallower depth helps to facilitate the breakdown of the body. This enables natural processes to take place, returning the body’s nutrients to the ecosystem rapidly.

3. GOAL – To maintain the quality of the natural environment

Objective

A green field site is required. Graves will be laid out in the same way as a conventional cemetery, but the area is planted instead of plot memorials. Other flora is grown around the plot to create a green or natural setting. Graves are not re-used because the objective is to turn the land into a natural area, therefore there is no desire to re-use the plot.

4. GOAL - To achieve rapid and real return of the body to the earth;

Objective

Being buried naturally means nature's own processes do their work, returning the body to the soil completely in only a matter of years. A Natural Burial cemetery in Wanganui would contribute to a sustainable environment for future generations.

5. GOAL - To provide a more affordable alternative to conventional

Objective

With cremation, bodies can take up to three hours to burn in a cremator, using up large quantities of fuels like diesel or gas.. Natural burials will reduce energy costs, and thereby have a less impact on fuel resources. Such a cemetery would also reduce future pressure on traditional cemetery space as graves can be located closer together in a more informal layout.

6. GOAL - To ensure low ongoing maintenance requirements

Objective

A Natural Burial cemetery would reduce future pressure on traditional cemetery space and decrease the costs of providing the service. Far less maintenance is required for natural cemeteries because they reduce the need for operations such as mowing, headstone upkeep, and keeping plots manicured. A high level of service is required with traditional burials to keep the cemetery well manicured.

Legal Requirements

The Natural Burials Policy covers the following requirements:

- Burial and Cremations Act 1964
- Wanganui District Council By-Law 1996
- Resource Management Act 1991 and District Plan Provisions
- Health (Burial) Regulations 1946 and Cremation Regulations 1973

Conditions of Natural Burials

The conditions required to be undertaken for Natural Burials is attached to this policy, and forms part of the Natural Burial Policy.

Adoption of Policy

The Natural Burials Policy was adopted by the Council on 22 May 2006, and at the appropriate time the Council will set the fees and charges for natural burials

Implementation of Policy

The Natural Burial Policy will be implemented when the Council extends the Aramoho Cemetery, Bombay Street in 2011.

Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed with any changes to the Burial and Cremations Act 1964 and any other policy review undertaken by the Wanganui District Council annual review in July each year.



Conditions for Natural Burials– Aramoho Cemetery

These conditions form part of the Natural Burial Policy adopted by the Council on 22 May 2006.

1. Aramoho Cemetery Sexton must be contacted at least eight working hours prior to any burial taking place
 - This is normal requirement for all burials.
 - Takes into account other funerals happening in the cemetery.
2. Grave/Plot Location
 - A designated grave/plot will be developed for this type of burial. This area will be located in the Bombay Street extension adjacent to the Aramoho cemetery.
 - A cemetery plan will be available from the office and indicates the location.
3. Burial Certificate
 - This document will be provided by the funeral director, or person responsible for conducting the funeral, prior to the interment.
 - If families are not using a funeral director then this document can be obtained from the cemetery office and must be completed and returned the day prior to the funeral.
4. Cemetery Fees/Payment
 - Fees for Natural Burials can be obtained either from the cemetery office or a funeral director.
 - If the funeral is conducted without a funeral director then all cemetery fees must be paid in full no later than the day before the funeral.
 - All Council's costs are invoiced by the Council.
5. Conditions of Burial/Plot sales
 - There is no provision to reserve plots. Each new plot will be immediately adjacent beside the previous one in a numbered sequence.
 - Plots will only be dug to a depth to allow one metre of cover.
6. Acceptable Casket/Coffin
Materials that can be used are as follows:
 - Caskets can only be made of untreated natural timber with no synthetic finishes.
 - Handles can be made of natural materials or natural rope.
 - Casket lining must be of bio-degradable material eg cotton.

Materials that **cannot** be used are as follows:

- Any types of plastic or metal fittings (exclusive of nails or screws).
- Treated varnish, glues or plastic sheeting inside casket.
- No non bio-degradable material inside or outside the casket.

7. Acceptable shrouds

- Woollen shrouds with a solid base are acceptable. The solid base which assists lowering into the ground can be of natural timber and contained within the shroud. Contents of shrouds must be fastened to a solid base to prevent movement to one side.

8. Unacceptable Casket/Coffin/Shroud

- Cardboard caskets.
- Caskets with varnish, plastic fittings etc.
- Casket leaking fluids.
- Casket having an obnoxious smell.

9. Chemicals

- Natural Burials are 'natural' and therefore, chemicals, embalming fluids, etc. are not permitted.

10. Communicable Diseases

- Cemetery Sexton must be informed if the deceased died of a communicable disease.
- Health burial regulations must be adhered to at all times.

11. Families need to be aware of memorial restrictions

- All plots will be allocated in sequence.
- No memorials are allowed on plots.
- The cost and maintenance of any shrub or small tree is included in plot purchase price.
- A small shrub or small tree is planted in lieu of a headstone. The tree species will be determined by the Council.
- Due to Health and Safety regulations, the digging of the graves will only be undertaken by Council staff.
- Families are able to help cover the grave.
- Memorial plaques may be placed on the memorial wall by the cemetery office.