

The Truth About Pet Cremation

The year was 2002 when the cremation industry was forever changed. In what would become a 40 million dollar lawsuit, heavy state regulation and an overhaul of proper management in the world of cremation, a situation arose in Georgia. Let's just say in very simple terms, a crematory wasn't doing their job. As a direct result, regulations were implemented by each state and oversight was instituted to be sure that cremations are carried out in a fashion that most undertakers stand for—dignity, honesty and respect. That was good for human beings, but what about our four-legged furry friends that become just as much a part of our family? Is the handling of their remains regulated the same way as those of humans?

Many of us have been raised with a dog or cat as the family pet. And most of us can clearly remember the day that our family pet passed away. Grief over a pet's loss is in some cases no different from the loss of an immediate family member. Therefore, you would think that respect of our pets would be applied to them as it is for our family members. It is not always that way. When it comes to cremation of our pets, veterinary clinics offer a method of disposition through third parties, most of which offer a means of group cremation or private cremation. To most of us, this would be defined as mass cremation with other pets at one time or individual cremation—one pet at a time. Many of us, therefore, would ask the clinic to do private cremation. Unfortunately, as Stephen J.

Dubner and WNYC reported in their podcast of 2012 entitled "The Troubled Cremation of Stevie the Cat," something very different from what we might expect could occur when we ask for a "private cremation."

With pet cremation, there is minimal regulation and therefore almost anyone can provide the service. So how does one truly know what kind of service they're really going to get? In the podcast, reporters approached a series of pet crematories and requested private cremation in an effort to test what would truly happen. The individuals supplied each crematory with a stuffed animal disguised in a bag. (Understand that after cremation, the only remains are bones, and when there are no bones in what is being cremated, such as a stuffed animal, there should be no cremated remains. Unfortunately, in this experiment, each crematory outfit failed the test. All the crematories returned cremated remains of "their pet."

Where did they come from? How could they do this? If these questions immediately fly through your mind, don't feel alone. They had me wondering as well, and I'm in the pet cremation business. What was discovered is that allegedly some pet crematories have a system in place after doing mass cremation, regardless of what the consumer requested, in which they would take a set amount of remains for a larger pet, such as a lab, and a smaller amount of remains for a smaller pet, such as a Chihuahua. Slap a label on the box, and send it to the family or the

vet. Everyone got a little something, no matter what. And it is therefore assumed that when they cremated a stuffed animal, they just simply followed their internal protocol and returned cremated remains.

The biggest question that comes out of this report is how can we be sure those cremated remains received are in fact those of our pets? The answer is simple, we need to be sure to ask the pet crematory (or any crematory outfit, for that matter) what steps are taken to ensure this. Each crematory should have instituted an identification and certification process at their facility. If not, perhaps you may want to look elsewhere. If pet cremation through a veterinary clinic is what you opt for, then ask the vet what steps are taken to guarantee the remains are those of your pet. Even better, find a reputable funeral and cremation firm that is regulated by industry state law, as those firms must do it properly or risk being closed if state inspectors find violations.

So what is the future of pet cremation? Will there be new regulations enacted or are we going to have to wait for a major scandal such as the one in Georgia? Regardless, consumers must learn to make the proper decisions when the time comes to bid their pets goodbye.

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