

ESCORTING REMAINS

By Ryan Helfenbein

Here we are, at the beginning of 2021, bidding farewell to a year that a majority of us wish simply never occurred. With our new year upon us, and after being trapped indoors for nearly three-fourths of 2020, many of us will begin planning trips. For some, this may be a time to take a late relative back home, that is, escorting cremated remains back to a hometown for permanent placement. With the crazy world we live in now, a maze of regulations challenge those traveling with cremated remains. In the chance that you are one who is taking the lead on this sort of pilgrimage, let's explore how it is done legally.

Most often undertakers oversee the organization and preparation of transporting cremated remains from one place to another. The most common and legal means of transporting cremated remains is the good old U.S. Postal Service. Within the United States, this is a rather streamlined process. The undertaker must use Priority Mail Express, with the cremated remains placed in a leakproof container and the exterior of the package labeled as such. That's right, there are special labels that clearly proclaim that the package contains human remains. This is a very clear-cut approach to transporting cremains domestically, although undertakers are often stumped with the question of how much insurance should be placed on the package.

International travel is where things start to get a bit more difficult. Most countries will simply ask to have a certified copy of the death certificate and certification of cremation be made available with the urn. However, others do make it a tad more challenging. For example, if cremated remains are to be sent to Italy, it is required that the following be sent well in advance to the Italian Consulate for approval: an original certified copy of the death certificate authenticated and translated in Italian, the most recent passport of the deceased, an original certificate of cremation, a statement of description of the required receptacle housing the cremated remains on letterhead from the funeral home, a small metal plate affixed to a required wooden shipping container and an authorized letter from the family stating (what feels like) everything but what the weather was on the day the person was born! When that is in order, a prepaid envelope must be included as well so that a request for authorization from the

proper authorities can be returned. An unusual amount of red tape to simply see that a loved one gets to a final place of rest, let alone, their cremated remains.

There is the option of the family flying with the cremated remains. Years ago, the undertaker would simply provide the family with a copy of the death certificate and instructions to inform the TSA representative at check-in that they are in fact traveling with cremated remains. TSA would 99% of the time let the individual move through. Today, it is a little more difficult – and ultimately depends on the airline. Most airlines are going to have a policy when it comes to transporting cremated remains. Generally, airlines require that a copy of the death certificate and

the cremation certificate accompany the remains, which must be placed in an urn that can be successfully X-rayed, such as plastic or cardboard. Note: TSA will not, and legally cannot, open the urn to view the actual cremated human remains, nor do they desire to do so. Ultimately, it all comes down to the actual airline you are traveling on, so be sure to check ahead.

Much like international mailing of cremated remains, escorting international air transport of cremated remains can become complex as well. The starting point for this is to simply contact the embassy of the country that will be accepting the cremated remains. Once you have an understanding of the requirements from the country to which the remains are being transported, you'll then have to contact the airline to be sure their requirements will be met as well. Or simply let your undertaker see that they arrive at your international destination.

Our complex world today has led to more requirements for this very simple task, so be sure to consult your undertaker for guidance.

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