

## Frequently Asked Questions and Answers from [Amanda Kelly of Awake](#) Greener goodbyes that leave the earth better.

### **1. Are ashes organic? Will they compost?**

Cremated remains (which we often call “ashes”) are inorganic and will not compost or biodegrade over time. In fact, archeologists have uncovered cremated remains that are tens of thousands of years old. While our living bodies have many organic elements, only inorganic components like salts and mineral crystals remain after cremation or aquamation.

### **2. What happens to all the ashes that have been spread thus far? Whether it is at the cottage or in a lake? What type of impact is that making on the environment?**

‘Ashes’ that are spread directly in nature remain there in perpetuity. When exposed to water (like rain) they become a solid mass that resembles concrete. Environmentally, the main concern is how these remains effect growing conditions for plants in the ecosystem. Our ‘ashes’ have an extremely high pH (similar to bleach); they are also sterile, with no healthy microbes remaining, and have highly concentrated levels of minerals and sodium. This combination leads to soil toxicity that prevents plant roots from absorbing the nutrients and water plants need. Above the surface we see this impact to plants as chronic nutrient deficiency, dehydration, leaf scorching, and necrosis.

### **3. Once I've thought about my burial preferences, who do I call to take action? What is the difference between funeral homes, cemeteries, other industry partners?**

Funeral homes will help you pre-arrange your final choices for your body: how will your body be cared for, would you like burial, cremation, or aquamation, what will your remains be within (wicker casket, wooden urn, jewelry, etc). If choosing full body burial, the funeral home will also make arrangements with your chosen cemetery on your behalf. This is included in their service fee.

If choosing cremation or aquamation, the funeral home will make these arrangements with the industry partner. From there, you may choose to be laid to rest either in a cemetery or have your remains kept by family or spread somewhere privately. If choosing a cemetery, either the funeral home can make these arrangements (in advance or when needed), or you or your next of kin may contact a cemetery directly (in advance or any time after death). If choosing somewhere privately (outside of a cemetery), such as your cottage or a provincial park, your next of kin may carry this out independently. If either of these options interest you, we have partnerships with Reynolds Funeral Home in Bracebridge for our new Planting Kits, and Township of Clearview for a new ashes-to-earth memorial garden starting. Both are launching Spring 2025.

#### **4. How do aquamation remains compare to cremated remains?**

When choosing aquamation (officially called Alkaline Hydrolysis), your next of kin will receive an urn of remains very similar to cremation 'ashes'. Visibly, they are often a lighter colour than with cremation. Scientifically, their composition is also very similar. The pH and mineral levels remain the same, while sodium levels are somewhat less as some of the body's salts have been diluted and flushed in the water-based process.

#### **5. If you are doing a burial with a shroud, would that be considered human composting? How long does it take a body to return to the earth in a burial like this (using a shroud or a plain wood coffin)?**

The term "human composting" (formally called terramation or natural organic reduction) refers to regulated, private facilities where our bodies are composted above ground in a controlled environment. The process takes a few months and remains are then laid to rest elsewhere. As of March 2025, this option has not been permitted in Canada.

In a natural burial, our bodies are placed directly in the ground without embalming, using a shroud or biodegradable casket. In natural burial our bodies gradually decompose in the earth. Some cemeteries may incorporate a compost product in this process, however the industry and regulations consider this different than "human composting".

The amount of time our bodies take to decompose in natural burial ranges depending on temperature, moisture, and soil microbes. Decomposition of our soft tissues can take from weeks to months, while our skeletons can remain for many years (even 100 or more).

#### **6. Can I bury Mom at the cottage?**

If you, Mom, or any friend or family member choose cremation or aquamation for your body, their remains can legally be spread on any private property (including your cottage) with permission from the owner.

Because of the toxicity of these remains to plants and ecosystems, we recommend using an AWAKE Planting Kit for this. While other products are available, our soil is the only patented solution to turn ashes to earth.

#### **7. Can my dog be buried with me?**

Yes, in certain places. Ontario recently updated regulations to allow pets and humans to be laid to rest together. However, cemeteries are responsible for their own by-laws and have their own stipulations for this. If being 'together forever' is

important, we recommend contacting multiple cemeteries to ask about their policies and letting your funeral home know when you make arrangements.