

# Step-by-Step Do-It-Yourself Funeral

## To-do BEFORE the death if possible:

- 1) Designate **an agent** to carry out all your funeral decisions, a person to answer the phone and make calls, one to act as the Dispositioner (getting the death certificate form filled out and signed by the doctor), someone to run errands, to communicate visiting hours, etc. (step 8 has a link to a free downloadable manual containing a list of 18 task/roles you can assign friends and family who desire something to do).
- 2) **Asap, call the office of Vital Records** in the county where the death will most likely occur. Let the Registrar know that the family plans to file for a Death Certificate themselves. Go to the State website to print out a form to gather the information for the death certificate:  
<http://health.utah.gov/vitalrecords/fileadeath/fileadeath.htm>
- 3) Find a **casket**: Build one, buy one or delegate someone else to do so.
- 4) **Call a cemetery** or crematory to let them know family will be acting as the Dispositioner. They will forewarn you of any rules you must comply with. If you prefer burial in a **non-commercial cemetery**, get permission from a contact person for that cemetery. For rural cemeteries in Utah go to [history.utah.gov](http://history.utah.gov), click on “research and collections”, then “cemeteries”. If you prefer burial on **your own private rural property** there are no Utah State regulations. For more details download the **Utah chapter** of laws at [www.Funerals.org](http://www.Funerals.org), click on “Bookstore”.
- 5) If a veteran, fill out form 21-2008: at [www.cem.va.gov/bbene/bflags.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/bbene/bflags.asp). After death bring it to the post office to receive a flag. Honorably discharged veterans get free burial at a Veterans National Cemeteries which includes the grave, vault, opening and closing, marker, and setting fee. More: [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)
- 6) Write the Program for the funeral (leaving the date of death blank)

## To do AFTER the death:

- 7) **When an Unexpected death occurs: call emergency law enforcement.** If you are not sure if the person is dead call 911 for an ambulance.  
When an Expected Death occurs: at home is the best situation- Call the Hospice you are working with or the attending physician if seen within 30 days otherwise call a non-emergency phone # of a local law enforcement agency.  
Hospital death: Let the Doctor and nurses know asap (even before death!) that you will NOT be using a funeral director, and will be getting the Death Certificate and moving the body as a family.
- 8) **Prepare the body** for casketing: Treat it with the same modesty as you would any ill person who is bed-bound. A booklet on how to ease carrying of the body, preventing seepage of body fluids and other logistics are on this website: <http://www.crossings.net/resources.html> click on the words “**have made it available here**”. Page 11 lists helpful supplies to have on hand.

**Set Features and slow decomposition:** Within a couple hours of death there are marked signs of stiffening of the body, called rigor mortis. So you want to close the eyes, mouth, and decide where the hands will be within the 1<sup>st</sup> couple hrs. After 24 hrs the muscles begin to relax again, which is a sign of decomposition. Keeping the body cool slows down all of these processes.

- You may need 16 lbs/day of dry ice to keep an average adult at about 40 degrees. Dry ice can be \$1/lb or more. Using thick gloves (like winter gloves), wrap the dry ice in a **paper bag** then **cloth** and place under the body... The room must be ventilated because of the carbon dioxide dry ice releases. In the winter, an open window in a closed off room can substitute for the dry ice.

- 9) **File** for a Death Certificate at the Vital Records office of **the county health department** of the county where death occurred. Bring with you:
- 1) The filled out worksheet (complete and print out before death occurs: [health.utah.gov/vitalrecords](http://health.utah.gov/vitalrecords) )
  - 2) i.d. (of the person filing the paperwork –aka “Dispositioner” )
  - 3) The ability to pay \$100-\$400 (**Death Certificate registration fee**: most counties \$100 during business hrs (Utah county charges according to how long it takes to enter the data, a couple counties don’t charge (most counties charge \$300 for weekend/holiday service), **Medical Examiners "permit": \$52, 1<sup>st</sup> death certificate: \$16, Extra copies** of the Death Cert: \$8).
  - 4) TIME (to get the doctors’ signature) Give the doctor a heads up and the dispositioners cell phone # in case the dr will call you to tell you where he/she is. Hopefully the Doctor is on EDEN (Utah’s Electronic Death Entry Network so he/she can sign it electronically instead of having you travel to get the signature and then back to Vital Records).
- You will want the death certificate much sooner than the legal 5 days because though a funeral director can **transport** the body or arrange **publication of an obituary**, you, without the D.C. and M.E.’s permit in hand, cannot.
- Some have been disappointed with the slow pace when they entrust filing the death certificate to Hospice or a funeral director, so enlist your most determined family member instead of the tempting offers of well-meaning professionals.
- 10) **Talk to clergy/Secure venues** for:
- a viewing (body visible) or visitation (body not visible),
  - a ceremony (funeral-body present, memorial -body not present)
  - the final disposition (burial or cremation). **A cemetery** needs to know as far ahead as possible.
- 11) **Delegate someone to notify others** of the place and time of finalized plans.
- 12) By now you may have received the Death Certificate and Burial Transit Permit needed to move the body. A **van** with back seats down or **pick-up truck** are ideal options for transporting the body in a casket or other container.
- 13) Finalize the **obituary** and bring it to the newspaper with the death certificate. Obituaries are very expensive. A typical length runs between \$400 to \$1000.
- 14) Finalize the Funeral **Program** and have it printed.
- 15) Transport to the place of ceremony, entering in the widest doors possible for pallbearers. Place a cloth covered table for the casket to rest on. You don’t need a fancy casket dolly to move the casket around the building. Let the pall bearers work. If they carried the casket from the home to a vehicle then they’ve had practice.