# Green/Environmental Coffins

## Introduction

In order to protect the reputation of cremation authorities, funeral directors and coffin manufacturers and suppliers, and to continue to allow the bereaved to have access to the widest range of coffins as possible, this initial guidance was formulated at a meeting between those representing the Institute, the Local Government Association, a major funeral directing company, a leading manufacturer of cardboard coffins and a number of experienced crematorium managers.

Following this meeting and joint input and agreement the Institute has produced this guidance document that deals with the cremation of coffins manufactured from cardboard, wicker, bamboo, banana leaf and other natural materials, such as wool, shrouds etc.

## Main Objective

The afore mentioned organisations and individuals wish to ensure that all cremations where green/environmental coffins are used are conducted and completed in a dignified, respectful and safe manner.

## Initial Guidance

All green coffins should have a flat, solid, fixed base with no snags so as to allow free, unobstructed passage over rollers or ball bearing tables. In the event of a non-integral base being fixed to a coffin it should be attached in a manner that will ensure that it cannot become detached during the process of charging into a cremator.

Both ends of the coffin should be of a robust construction sufficient to withstand the pressure of a mechanical charging machine.

In respect of mechanical chargers, the width of the charging plate/head should be greater than the width of the coffin or casket.

Where there is concern that early ignition of the coffin might occur, i.e. major combustion occurring before the charge door can be fully closed, the generic risk assessment contained on the following page can be adapted/modified to suit local conditions.

## Secretary of State's Guidance note for Crematoria PG5/2(12)

Note should also be made of the Secretary of State's Guidance note for Crematoria PG5/2(12) and particularly clauses 3.2, 5.20.and 5.27 that recognise/contain the following requirements in respect of coffins:

- The brief "flash" caused by volatilisation of the veneer on the outside of the coffin.
- Cardboard coffins should not contain chlorine in the wet-strength agent (i.e. not using polyamidoamine-epichlorhydrin based resin (PAA-E)).
- Materials to be avoided in coffin or casket construction, furnishings and body preparation/embalming include halogenates, metals (except steel screws and staples), wax and more than a thin layer of water based lacquer on wood'.
- PVC and melamine should not be used in coffin construction and furnishings.
- Coffins containing lead or zinc should not be cremated.

**/continues**

Whilst not an issue in respect of charging a coffin into a cremator, the subject of potential leakage from a coffin has been raised. Any leakage into a wicker coffin would manifest itself very quickly whilst leakage into a cardboard coffin might compromise the rigidity of the coffin itself. Members are advised to note the item on this subject within the generic risk assessment. Funeral Directors are requested to ensure that the coffin is adequately lined using appropriate material that will prevent leakage.

Members are encouraged to discuss this guidance with their local funeral directors in order to combine to meet with its main objective. In turn funeral directors are encouraged to discuss this guidance with their suppliers.

**Generic Risk Assessment**

| Hazard | Risk | Harm | Action to reduce risk |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Rapid ignition of fabric of the coffin | Smoke and fume emission into the crematory. | Fumes/smoke inhaled by technician. | Lightly dampen coffin with water spray, or similar alternative, prior to charging. |
| 2. Solvent based coating | Flash back of flames. | Burn injuries to technician.<br>Fumes/smoke inhaled by technician.<br>Damage to equipment/crematory. | Lightly dampen coffin with water spray, or similar alternative, prior to charging. |
| 3. Weak coffin base | Entrapment on rollers/penetration by ball bearings on table causing partial charging giving rise to major fire risk. | Fumes/smoke inhaled by technician.<br>Damage to equipment/crematory.<br>Major fire. | Attempt to manually complete the charging if safe to do so.<br>If not safe use fire blanket and raise the alarm. Evacuate crematory, chapel and adjacent buildings (as per fire policy). |
| 4. Weak ends of coffin | Coffin crumples/distorts under pressure from charging machine causing exposure of the deceased and possible partial charging as 3 above. | As 3 above.<br>Psychological impact on technician.<br>Added distress to the bereaved.<br>Reputational damage to cremation authority, funeral director, coffin manufacturer/supplier. | As 3 above. |
| 5. Leakage of fluid | Contact with body fluid.<br>Odour in chapel and crematory. | Whilst risk of infection is low a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of mourners and technicians is possible. | Advise funeral directors to ensure that all coffins are adequately lined with suitable material.<br>Cremate as soon as possible on same day as funeral service. Do not hold over where leakage is evident.<br>Clean any contaminated areas with an appropriate disinfectant. |

**Note:** Crematorium managers must ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment including heat resistant gloves, face shields, fire resistant overalls and fire blankets are made available and maintained.