

Step-by-Step Instructions for a DIY, Home Funeral, Family Directed Funeral

Can Do BEFORE a Death:

1) If you don't know what your options are, then you don't have any. So use our [funeral planning worksheet](#) to help you consider the many choices that you have.

2) Appoint an Agent to Control Disposition and/or a Dispositioner.

Utah law [Utah code [58-9-601](#) & [58-9-602](#)] allows adults to appoint one person to be their "Agent to Control Disposition of Remains". An Agent has first priority over [next-of-kin](#), in matters of after-deathcare decisions. You may use the [Agent to Control Disposition Form.pdf](#) to assign a person.

After death occurs this Agent is authorized to assign someone else, or themselves, to be "The Dispositioner": A Dispositioner goes to the Health Department to apply for a Death Certificate (DC) and Burial Transit Permit (BTP) and attends the body to the place of final disposition (cemetery or crematory).

3) Start the Proper Paper Work

Go to <https://vitalrecords.health.utah.gov/death>, scroll down the page to "File A Death Record" and click on "the death record processing form." to download it. They title the form: "Dispositioner Worksheet for completing a Death Record". Unfortunately the State made it a Word doc too, so for accessibility [here it is as a PDF](#). Don't wait to START filling it out. The form helps you to gather the information that will be needed by the Office of Vital Records. (Make note of their open hours. Not all are open daily. Often there is more than one branch in each county, with different open-hours).

Call and inform the Registrar that you plan to "file a Death Record as a Dispositioner" instead of hiring a funeral home.

Some Registrars let you **bring in** the completed "Dispositioner Worksheet" before death occurs so they can start the data entry and check your i.d. as the acting Dispositioner. That way you only need to call them with the "time of death", then make one trip back down there to pay and pick up your permits. This is especially helpful when death occurs over a weekend or after-hours.

4) [Build or buy a casket or body board](#)

"A leakproof container" is stated in the law as being required to transport a body. Leakproof does not mean a box or bag that can be turned into a swimming pool. Leakproof means you won't get bodily fluids trailing you wherever you bring the body.

The goal is to make transport through public spaces modest, leak-free & smell-free. (The sooner in the first 24 hrs that cooling the body begins the less likely there will be any smell.)

To make initial transport of a body from a care facility easier, BRING:

-Some kind of a [body board with handles](#). Ask to use the facilities' gurney if you don't have enough people to carry it loaded to your SUV, Subaru, van or truck.

-Two people should be enough to slide a loaded board or casket into a vehicle.

-One or two 2" thick cardboard or pvc tubes about 18" long. You will place the board/casket on the tube(s) and even a heavy board/casket will roll right in.

-One sheet and chux pad from home (for under the body). Here is a 3 min video demonstrating using a sheet [to lift a body as a team](#). A sheet is nice because if seepage begins it can be identified and taken care of immediately whereas a plastic body bag can spread leaking fluids all over the body, as well as build up heat and smells.

-Another covering from home to drape over the body when carrying the body through public spaces.

-Plastic sheeting if there is a high possibility of seepage (unexpected death, recent surgery, obesity).

If picking up from the Medical Examiner (ME) the body may be in a commercial body bag. If you have a body board in your vehicle it will be easier to move the body in and out of the vehicle. You will drive your vehicle right into their transport bay. They do not want DIYers to open the bag (or have a viewing without a mortuary helping you after an autopsy). However you will still need to keep the [body cold](#) until final disposition (cremation or burial).

5) If planning whole body burial, call the cemetery.

Let them know when death is expected and who will be acting as the Dispositioner. The Sextant should inform you of any cemetery policies & procedures you must comply with. If you prefer burial in a non-commercial or rural cemetery, get permission from a contact person for that cemetery. For a list of those in Utah go to <https://history.utah.gov/cemeteries/> click on "find a cemetery".

If you prefer burial on your own private rural property there are no State Regulations in Utah but there may be County Ordinances (see our [cemetery page](#) for the 3 counties with restrictions). There are no Cities that allow private land burial within city limits.

6) Begin Writing a Program for a Funeral or Memorial Service

If a program is desired there are lots of templates online. You can write it up and insert pictures beforehand (leaving the date of death blank). Have AT LEAST two people review it for typos.

7) Gather the knowledge you need to take care of a body after death.

A dead body is treated with the same modesty and dignity as any live person who is bed-ridden. Here are tips on how-to move a body, prevention for seepage of body fluids and other

logistics: <http://www.crossings.net/resources.html> (the 1st paragraph follow the link: "to view a free summary on home funeral care")

Videos:

[Lifting the Body](#) (3 min) [Moving a body](#) (15 seconds each) thru doors and into vehicles

[Part 2 — Washing the Head, Face, and Mouth](#) (11min),

[Part 3 — Washing the Body](#) (9min, the body should be draped modestly as you would a live bedridden person, but they didn't for the video),

[Part 4 — Dressing the Body](#) (6min includes closing eyes & mouth),

[Part 5 — Final Preparations](#) (8min includes casketing or wrapping in a shroud) In reading/watching those primers remember you don't have to do things you find uncomfortable. You can alter instructions to fit your needs.

Within a couple hours of death there are marked signs of stiffening of the body, called rigor mortis. So the first couple of hours is an opportunity to close the eyes and mouth, dress the body if desired, and place arms and hands where you want them. After 24-48 hrs you get another chance as the muscles begin to relax again (which is a sign of decomposition). Keeping the body cool slows down these processes. See our [COOLING A BODY](#) page, summarized here:

-About 16 lbs of dry ice/day are needed to keep an average adult between 33 to 40 degrees. Dry ice is purchased at most grocery stores. Using thick gloves, wrap the dry ice in a paper bag then cloth and place about the body. A room/or vehicle must be ventilated because of the carbon dioxide dry ice releases.

-Another option is re-freezable ice packs.

-When the temp outside is below 40 degrees, an open window in a separate room or garage may substitute for dry ice. Keeping a thermometer in or near the casket is advised.

8) Let the Doctor/Hospice/Hospital/Vital Records Registrar know as-soon-as-possible that "Family are acting as their own Dispositioner". The Doctor/Hospice/Hospital/Registrar may not have a clear written policy on how to deal with you. Therefore confused and scared employees may need some runway to get oriented and be helpful. Tips to make initial transport of a body from a care facility easier:

[-What to bring and why](#)

[-Ways hospital staff can support home funeral families](#)

Can't Do UNTIL After a Death:

9) When an [Expected Death Occurs \(see in a flow chart\)](#):

Home death is the best situation: Call the Hospice you are working with or the attending physician (if seen within 30 days), otherwise call the non-emergency phone # of your 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. You will need to get the Death Certificate and Burial Transit Permit, BEFORE moving the body. The hospital should have a cold storage location/morgue to hold the body until you acquire proper paperwork, but usually does not hold many bodies. Remind them that your loved one is a priority because funeral homes can pick up quickly whereas by state law you can not.

When [Unexpected Death Occurs \(see in a flow chart\)](#):

If you are not sure if the person is dead call 911 for an ambulance. If the person is long gone call non-emergency law enforcement. Law enforcement will call the Medical Examiner to decide if the body needs [an autopsy](#). An autopsy buys you time. The M.E. will begin the Death Certificate process and may even issue your Burial Transit Permit (not sure).

10) Go to the Vital Records Office of the Health Department of the County where death occurred for the Registrar to perform the data entry of the [Vital Records Form](#) you filled out. Bring with you:

a) That completed Death Record Form

b) Your i.d. (you are the "Dispositioner")

c) The ability to pay the data entry fee: most counties \$100 during business hrs. Utah county charges according to how long it takes the registrar to enter the data or \$75, a couple counties don't charge extra (some counties supposedly charge \$300 for after-hours weekend/holiday service),

Burial Transit Permit (BTP): \$157, 1st death certificate: \$30, Extra copies of the Death Cert: \$10,

You will want the Death Certificate sooner than the legal 5 days because, though a funeral director can transport a body and arrange publication of an obituary; you, without the DC and BTP in hand, cannot do either of those things.

The body can be moved after the Vital Records Registrar hands you the Death Certificate and Burial Transit Permit. If the signing Doctor (who has 3 days to sign) is on the Electronic Death Entry Network (EDEN), it is faster to get the Doctor to sign than if the paperwork has to be brought to the Doctor.

11) Choose a right-sized vehicle.

A van (with back seats down) or pick-up truck, or even an SUV are ideal options for transporting a body in a casket. Dimensions for your make and model can be found online to confirm the measurements are adequate.

12) Notify cemetery or crematory as to time of your arrival.

If the cemetery requires you buy a graveliner (same as a vault, just cheaper) you can buy one directly from a vault/monument company. [Beesley Monument Company](#) in **Provo, UT** is glad to serve family acting as their own Dispositioner, and will give you the same wholesale price they give the funeral homes. Beesley only charges mileage if delivery is outside of 50 miles. (Vault or Grave liner comes with the lowering device and other graveside accouterments like grass, chairs and awning. Ask to make sure).

12) Plan with clergy or officiant (if you desire their participation) & Secure venues.

Even a standard front parlor room is excellent for an open house viewing or visitation:

- **Viewing** (body is visible) or **visitation** (body is not visible: closed casket, or body not present)
- **Funeral** (body is present) or **memorial** (body is not present)
- **Final disposition** (burial, cremation, aquamation or Natural organic reduction):

13) Acquire a Veterans' Flag if the deceased received DD214 discharge papers.

To get a flag fill out form 27-2008 at: <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/burial-flags/>

After death bring form to the post office **or** go to a Regional VA office to receive the flag. Sometimes a Veterans cemetery will arrange the flag for you. Free burial at Veterans' Cemeteries include grave, opening and closing, marker, and setting.

Burial of a spouse of a Veteran costs under \$1k for plot. Both require purchase of your own grave liner (see step 12)

14) Finalize Death Notice or Obituary.

Typically Obituaries cost at least \$400 and average \$1500. Send your write-up and pics online to the newspaper with the Death Certificate. Some papers allow you to publish a minimum obit, adding more words and photos after the funeral for free.

A death notice in the paper can be \$0 to \$100.

Some newspapers offer an "online only" obit for, like \$79.

Online Obituary sites that help you build, share and host a permanent obituary:

-<https://www.obituare.com/> for \$99.

-This Obituary website hosts obits and can also send it to be published in ANY newspaper in the country: <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/utah> for \$149 & up

15) Prepare the body for casketing: See step #7 instructions & videos.

16) **Check for accuracy** of ceremony address & cemetery address by copying into a map app. Delegate a person(s) to notify friends & family of the finalized place and times. (You need a social media savvy person and a phone calling/texting person)

17) Finalize Funeral Program & Greeter Assignments

Find a template online, download, edit & print one. **Have a couple people proofread it.** Then print the quantity you need. Assign greeters to hand them to attendees. It's also heartwarming to see a neatly dressed man at the preferred entry door, to direct traffic and help people in.

18) Prepare place of ceremony & Transport body &/or Transport photos, flowers and memorabilia.

Set up a table for the casket to rest on, or plan to have it on the floor. When choosing a table consider the weight of the casket & if a tablecloth will be needed). You don't need a casket dolly to move the casket through a building. Since small doorways can be awkward, Pallbearers should practice before people start arriving.

Note on Transporting Out-of-State:

Utah Funeral Directors are required by their licensure to embalm before they take a body across state lines.

Dispositioners are NOT subject to Licensure Rules so you don't need the body embalmed to cross state lines.

If the body is shipped by common carrier (such as plane, or train) several states require either embalming *or* a sealed casket. However, this is rarely enforced and funeral homes in those states will routinely ship unembalmed bodies (Jewish or Muslim clients, for example). Remember: The CDC has consistently maintained that embalming is [not a method of protecting public health](#).

FD =Funeral Director [2023 more detailed charts by Lee Webster NH Funeral Resources](#)

States Where Families Must Hire a FD

	FD sign, certify, or file death certificate	FDs must perform body removal or transport	Denies the rights of next of kin to perform any duties beyond home care	Only FDs are issued burial/transit permits	Only FDs and Medical Examiners can issue burial/transit permits	FDs must supervise final disposition
<i>Connecticut</i>						
<i>Florida</i>						
<i>Illinois</i>						
<i>Iowa</i>						
<i>Indiana</i>						
<i>Louisiana</i>						
<i>New York</i>						
<i>Michigan</i>						
<i>Nebraska</i>						
<i>New Jersey</i>						

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You can Make Your own Floral Arrangements

These are all **used** flowers that we washed, repaired and rearranged.



