A lasting legacy
How to have a more sustainable funeral

Planning a funeral the greener way – what did we do?

Traditional funerals can have a significant effect on the environment. Every decision we make can have an impact.

From the choice of coffin to the method of body committal and disposal, it is important to consider the environmental impact of each choice.

Until recently, there has been no expert, independent and publicly available information about the relative impact of these choices.

Thanks to community-funded research, we now have access to data that can help you make greener choices.

The research was carried out by experts using Life Cycle Analysis on two key elements of the funeral process: the impact of different coffin materials and body committal/disposal options.

While the research is not exhaustive and there is much to be learned, it provides the most transparent and independent data publicly available now.

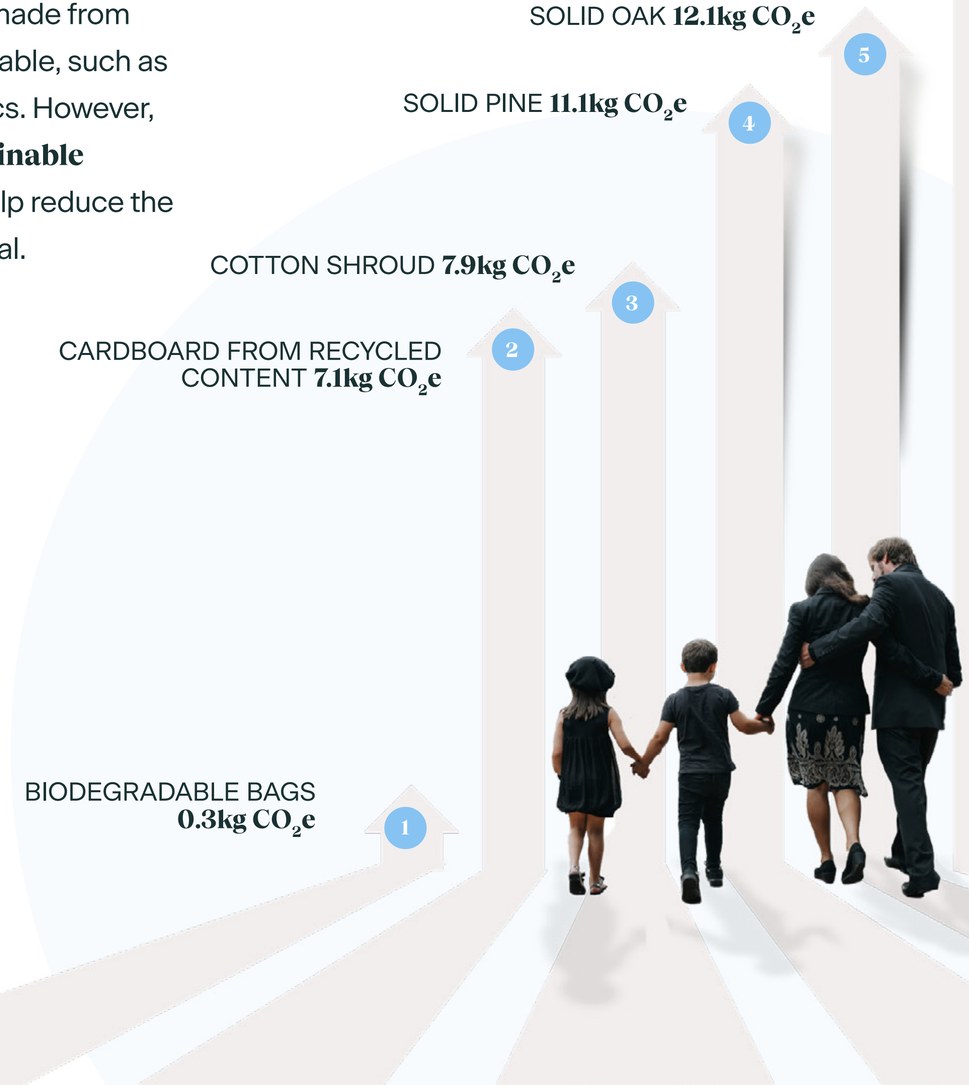
The results of the research showed that some coffin materials like solid wood, or cardboard and body committal options such as natural burials are associated with lower greenhouse gas emissions (GHGe).

However, it's important to keep in mind that other choices, such as travel and memorial location, also have an impact.

1. Coffins

THE 5 MOST SUSTAINABLE COFFIN OPTIONS, ANALYSED

Traditional coffins are often made from materials that are not sustainable, such as hardwoods, metals, or plastics. However, there are several more **sustainable options** available that can help reduce the environmental impact of burial.



Other coffin options available

6. Woollen Shroud (100% sheeps wool) | **13.2kg CO_2e**
7. Woollen Textile with cardboard sides & MDF base | **14.9kg CO_2e**
8. Cardboard with MDF base | **15.3kg CO_2e**
9. Bamboo from Vietnam | **23kg CO_2e**
10. Wicker (British Willow) | **28.7kg CO_2e**
11. Oak Veneer, Chipboard sides & base | **31.3kg CO_2e**
12. Oak Veneer, Chipboard sides & MDF base | **31.6kg CO_2e**
13. Elm Veneer, Chipboard sides & base | **32.4kg CO_2e**
14. Vinyl wrapped MDF | **32.9kg CO_2e**
15. Mahogany Veneer, Chipboard sides, MDF base | **37.3kg CO_2e**

2. Committal

OPTIONS FROM BEST TO WORST

Second to **traditional burial and natural burial**, with a manually dug grave - resomation, also known as alkaline hydrolysis is considered least carbon intensive, sustainable option for the disposal of human remains.

However, it's important to keep in mind that other choices, such as travel, memorial location, use of renewable energy (for **cremation**) can affect overall emissions. For a more thorough breakdown, download our full report

Our research looked predominantly at the carbon required for each process. We briefly considered the impact on air, land and water but more thorough work needs to be done to further this work. It is our opinion that when everything is considered, **natural burial** is likely to be the best option.

High CO_2e

Low CO_2e

Natural gas cremation

126kg CO_2e

Highly intense process due to energy required to reach combustion. This has the highest carbon footprint for the energy consumption stage of the life cycle. In addition to this, the air pollution associated is likely to be significant. However, This can be carried out more sustainably if fuelled by electricity from a sustainable source.

Resomation

20kg CO_2e

Using the chemical process of alkaline hydrolysis to reduce the body to organic matter, with no tissue residual. Although this method has low carbon emissions associated with it, this report did not analyse the impact of chemicals used or effluent disposal, as there is no publicly available data on these aspects.

Traditional burial

4.1kg CO_2e

While the immediate carbon emissions associated with this method are small, the use of fuel-powered machinery for digging results in a key contribution (4.1kg CO_2e). Unlike natural burial, (shallower and allows organisms to aid decomposition) it may take around 100 years for the body to fully degrade.

Natural burial

0.kg CO_2e

Interment of the body without chemical intervention, to allow decomposition through a natural process with minimum impact and likely over a shorter period of time. There is minimal release of CO_2 into the atmosphere as the carbon is sequestered into other living organisms.

Where can I find out more information?

Download the full report

We are making the **full report** available to everyone who wants to know more about greener funeral choices. We also hope to encourage others in the funeral industry to make their data publicly available, and to help funeral directors and regulators understand how they can reduce their GHGe and meet the UK's collective obligations to reach net zero by 2050. We believe that by working together, we can make a positive impact on the environment.

Where to start

- Find a funeral director who can help you understand the impact of funeral choices on the environment.
- Consider body committal methods that have a lower impact on the environment.
- Natural burials are the most environmentally friendly options available, whilst natural gas cremations are the most detrimental.
- Coffins made of cardboard, solid wood or shrouds are the most environmentally friendly, whereas wood veneer or vinyl wrapped coffins are the worst.
- Consider the broader aspects of the funeral: from materials used to travel.

Are you interested in **reading**

the full, free report? Access it below.

Full Report

#DoMoreGood

Official release date 06th July 2023 All prior versions are now obsolete and no longer valid