

Cremation is popular, but is it eco-friendly?

by [Lauren Markoe](#) in the [February 19, 2014](#) issue

Cremation is forbidden in traditional Islam and Judaism but accepted by most other religions. It is also the fastest-growing way Americans choose to deal with their bodies after death. But does it hurt the environment?

The Cremation Association of North America predicts that 44 percent of American deaths will result in cremation by 2015. Many Americans, religious or otherwise, are under the impression that cremation is a prime environmental option—it takes up less land and avoids the danger of groundwater contamination from embalming chemicals in the body.

But the cremation society does not promote it as a green option. Green burial advocates note the tremendous energy expended by crematoriums, the pollutants released into the atmosphere from mercury and other metals found in tooth fillings and surgical implants, and the fact that cremated bodies are often embalmed beforehand.

As the Green Burial Council concludes: “Cremation uses far fewer resources than almost any other disposition option, but it certainly has an environmental impact.”

But cremation options billed as more environmentally friendly are emerging, for example, alkaline hydrolysis. Also known as resomation, alkaline hydrolysis dissolves the body in a process that involves pressure, an alkali solution, and heating at much lower temperatures than necessary in crematoria. Metals are separated from body tissues and can be disposed of properly instead of burned.

It’s legal in only eight states—Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota and Oregon—and some have questioned how green it really is. —RNS

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