

Metals and Cremation

How recycling of surgical metals gives something back to our community



Catholic Cemeteries
& Crematoria
Care, Compassion, Choice

Catholic Cemeteries & Crematoria is participating in a program that creates the opportunity to recycle surgical metals remaining after cremation. Funds raised will be directed towards a NSW charity.

If your loved one has had an orthopaedic implant during their lifetime, you may wonder what happens to the metals after cremation.

When a coffin or casket is cremated, the majority of metal components that have been surgically incorporated into the body of the deceased (i.e. prosthetic or orthopaedic devices such as artificial joints, plates or screws) are not destroyed by the heat of the cremator. These surgical metal components combine with the metal remains from the coffin or casket (staples, screws, hinges etc.) and remain in the cremation chamber amongst the cremated remains.

When most people consider recycling, we think about paper, plastics or glass. It is also possible to recycle metals, and this may include the various metals used in items such as artificial joints. The metals used for implants are special medical grade stainless steel, titanium, tungsten and cobalt chrome. All are produced from non-renewable resources and all have recyclable value.

Why recycle?

Until recently, unless a family requests otherwise, metal items left over from cremation are buried in the grounds of the cemetery as they are unable to be ground for integration within the cremated remains. A very small percentage of families ask for the cremation metal to be returned, however the majority do not.

In a time when environmental issues are becoming more important to us all, we are realising that we cannot continue practices that may harm the environment.

The decision to recycle surgical metals remaining after cremation is an environmentally responsible one. It reduces the amount of landfill material and also helps ensure the use of non-renewable resources is minimised. The fact that all proceeds raised are donated to charity means that the recycling can have both an environmental and a broader social impact.

Recycling of metals remaining after cremation is now fully accepted in over 15 countries across Europe, including the UK and also in some states of the USA. Over 450 cremation facilities now participate with a combined amount of around 200 tonnes of metals being recycled.

Where do the metals go?

Catholic Cemeteries & Crematoria has partnered with Austeng Pty Ltd, a Melbourne company for the collection and shipping of these metals to OrthoMetals, a fully certified and registered company with more than 15 years of experience in conducting the collection and recycling of metals for crematoria worldwide, including Australia.

Once the metals are received by OrthoMetal, they are recycled in the form of granulates to the original material. The process is a guaranteed recycling system to ensure that all orthopaedic implants are not able to be re-used.

What happens to the money raised by recycling?

The recycling of these metals does generate funds. Any proceeds raised from metals collected from Catholic Cemeteries & Crematoria will be donated to a registered NSW charity.

What if I want to have the metal item returned to me or my family?

Unless otherwise indicated prior to the cremation occurring, all metal items remaining after cremation will be recycled. However, if you would like to have the particular item returned to you, please advise your Funeral Director prior to the cremation. Our staff will make arrangements to keep the item and have it returned when the cremated remains are collected.

Please note that soft/precious metals melt during the cremation process and are dispersed throughout the remains of the cremator and are reduced to tiny granules. These cannot be recovered and returned to the family so it is recommended that all jewellery is removed prior to cremation.



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