

Memorial Business Journal

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Photo Courtesy of Arlington Cemetery, Drexel Hill, Pa.



California Seeking to Ride The Alkaline Hydrolysis Wave Bill Advances to Senate, Approval Expected

SACRAMENTO – Last week the California State Assembly unanimously approved A.B. 2283, which would amend the state's Health and Safety code to change the definition of cremation to include alkaline hydrolysis, a "chemical dissolution process using heat, high pressure water, and potassium hydroxide to hydrolyze human tissue and the consumable container."

Introduced by Assemblyman Jeff Miller, the bill has been advanced to the state senate for consideration. If approved, California would join Florida, Maine and Oregon as states that have taken legislative action to permit the process for the general public. A number of other states, including Minnesota and Colorado, permit the practice for institutional procedures, such as the disposition of cadavers at medical and veterinary schools. Meantime, a number of states are having the conversation about amending their laws to include the process in their approved methods of disposition of human remains. Some states argue that while the process isn't officially "legal" in their states for public consumption, it isn't illegal either. Meaning a business could test the waters and seek to install a facility following the licensing and permit process currently on the books.

The California bill also instructs the state's Cemetery and Funeral Bureau to adopt regulations for the safe operation of alkaline hydrolysis chambers no later than July 1, 2011.

Robert J. Achermann, executive director of the California Funeral Directors Association, which supported the bill, noted that there is no opposition to the A.B. 2283 and he does not expect there to be any problem getting the bill through the state senate and signed by the governor.

"The association has had meetings with Miller's office about some of the technical issues about how you define the process," Achermann said. "I think most funeral directors believe this is something that will generate consumer interest as an alternative to traditional cremation." Another consideration in the state — cemeteries in California, especially near the major metropolitan areas, are running short on space.

Supporters call alkaline hydrolysis, which is also referred to as bio-cremation, Resomation or water resolution, a "greener" alternative to traditional cremation. The process itself reportedly uses about less than 20 percent of the energy used for a cremation. Further, CO2 emissions are reduced by nearly 90 percent and the process avoids putting mercury and other harmful contaminants into the atmosphere.

Basically, a body is placed into a stainless steel container with potassium hydroxide (a form of lye) and heated to more than 300 degrees F. Turbulence is used to accelerate the dissolving of flesh

and soft tissue. Usually the process takes, on average, about three or four hours. What's left is a sterile liquid substance containing amino acids, peptides, sugars and salts that are purportedly environmentally friendly and can be washed down the drain. The remaining bone fragments are whiter in appearance than those that are cremated. The bones are then pulverized into a fine white, ash-like substance and can be returned to the family.

"I am told there are no discharge issues, it is a process that has been used in Europe for some time," Achermann said. "But being California the environment is always at the forefront."

Assemblyman Miller was approached with the idea by a funeral director, Chris Miller (no relation), owner of Thomas Miller Mortuary in the assemblyman's home district of Corona. Chris Miller also approached the state association to lobby to have the law changed.

Eye on the Process

The forward progress in California has turned a spotlight on the process as a whole. The technology evolved out of necessity in Europe as the high volume of cremation in densely populated areas compelled nations to put limits on the emissions. The first application of alkaline hydrolysis to be used for processing human remains in the United States took place in 1998 at the University of Florida, Gainesville, to dispose of medical school cadavers. The second system, also for institutional purposes, was in 2005 at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Currently, there are no funeral homes offering alkaline hydrolysis as a means of disposing of human remains in the United States. The first commercial application of the process is scheduled to be installed this summer by Matthews International, which partnered with a Scottish firm, Resomation Ltd. in 2008. The location of the unit, pending final approvals of the necessary permits, is at the Anderson-McQueen Family Tribute Center in St. Petersburg, Fla., which will be a showcase for the use and application of bio-cremation for the public.

According to Steve Schaal, division manager for sales and marketing of Matthews Cremation, Apopka, Fla., the opening of the facility is just a few months away. "The emission test data and technical solution are in the hands of the local

Alkaline Hydrolysis Step-by-Step

APOPKA, FLA. – According to Matthews International Cremation Division the bio-cremation process takes about three hours. Below is a step-by-step analysis of the cycle.

Step 1 – Load: Door is opened and the body (in a silk container) is placed in a stainless steel basket and loaded into the unit.

Step 2 – Preparation: Load cells automatically weigh the body and the system calculates the corresponding amount of water and alkali to be added to the vessel.

Step 3 – Fill: The correct amount of water and alkali is added to the vessel.

Step 4 – Heat Up and Cycle: The vessel is heated to approximately 300-350 degrees F by passing steam through the internal coil and the solution is continuously mixed allowing for a fast bio reaction. Begins to heat up to the desired operating temperature of approximately 370°F - it will hold that temperature for approximately 45 minutes.

Step 5 – Cool Down: The bio remains are then rapidly cooled through a recirculation pump and cooling water. This process also takes about 45 minutes

Step 6 – Drain: When the bio-cremation process is complete, the vessel is drained to leave only the bio remains.

Step 7 – Rinse: The vessel and porous bio remains are rinsed with hot water for cleaning purposes .

Step 8 – Bone Removal & Drying: After rinsing, the bio remains are removed from the vessel, dried and processed into a fine, pure white ash. This can be placed in an urn and returned to the family.

Source: Matthews International Cremation Division. Used by permission.

St. Petersburg Waste Water authorities,” he said. “We believe we’ve thoroughly answered every technical requirement and anticipate approvals within the next few months. Because it’s the first in the world within a funeral home, we’re going where no other company has gone.”

Matthews and BioSAFE Engineering, Brownsburg, Ind., are two of just a handful of firms in the United States to offer the equipment. Another competitor, CycledLife, Denver, unveiled its prototype vessel this month. Transition Science, a Toronto-based company is the licensed distributor of Resomation in Canada. That country’s first bio-cremation system is currently being installed in Toronto.

A Significant Investment

Where alkaline hydrolysis accelerates the decomposition process, there is not likely to be much acceleration in the legislative pace even as a number of states are currently discussing the process. However, once the conversation advances past the legal hurdles (no small task especially if you are talking about introducing any liquid remains into a sanitary sewer system), getting into the alkaline hydrolysis business is not an inexpensive investment. Equipment ranges in price from \$200,000 to \$400,000, which is about 3 to 5 times the cost of a traditional cremation retort.

However, the alkaline hydrolysis chambers may offer savings in other areas. In California, for example, funeral homes or crematories investing in the technology would not be required to acquire air emission permits, which is an expensive, time-consuming process, Achermann said. Manufacturers suggest that the alkaline hydrolysis vessel offers lower maintenance than a traditional retort, which has to be rebricked after so many hours.

With Matthews manufacturing both traditional cremation retorts and bio-cremation vessels, Schaal commented on the maintenance issue. “Since there is no refractory, there would be none of these costs for floors, walls or ceiling,” he said, adding that since the interior is all stainless steel, the occasional bath rinse is required.

“The biggest maintenance we initially see is the door seal, which would be monitored and replaced probably once per year with an annual inspection,” Schaal said. “The material cost is probably less than \$50 so we view this as a direct saving to owners/operators.”

David Nixon, Nixon Consulting, Chatham, Ill., said that the technology is still too new to have a solid compilation of data. “A traditional retort will have to rebrick after so many hours,” he said. “But we don’t know what the long-term picture is. Until a history of data is developed, maintenance of the alkaline hydrolysis chambers is speculative. Five or 10 years down the road we will find out what the maintenance issues are.”

Maine and Oregon revised their crematory and licensing rules in late 2009. So far, neither state has a working facility nor is one planned. “I don’t think any are in the formative phase,” said Sally Belanger, executive director of the Maine Funeral Directors Association, “Word of such activities would travel fast through Maine,” she added. Last fall Maine revised its definition of cremation to include “The technical process, using direct flame and heat, or other process, that reduces human remains to bone fragments. The reduction takes place through heat and evaporation, or through other processes, including, but not limited to, chemical dissolution.”

More than 60 percent of the deaths per year in Oregon are cremated. Mark Stehn, executive director of the Oregon Funeral Directors Association, said the association did support last year’s effort amend ORS 692 which allows the state’s Mortuary & Cemetery Board to license new and emerging technology, if it meets the permit requirement within the county.

To the north, Jewell Steffensen, executive secretary of the Washington State Funeral Directors Association, said that a process to review changes to the law to allow alkaline hydrolysis is underway. Steffensen said a letter was sent to the Department of Licensing, Funeral & Cemetery Division by Matthews International asking what type of requirements would be needed in order to have a unit installed in a funeral home in Washington. “In April the board members met for their regular meeting in which I attended,” Steffensen said. “They moved to form a committee with stakeholders to review what changes, if any, to the Revised Code of Washington and/or the Washington Administrative Code would be needed to regulate the bio-cremation system. All of them felt that this would eventually pass.”

Neither the National Funeral Directors Association nor the International Cemetery, Cremation & Funeral Association have adopted a position on the alkaline hydrolysis process. “We see it as another disposition option from which families may choose, in addition to earth burial, entombment in a mausoleum or cremation,” said Jessica Koth, NFDA public relations manager. “The only challenge that might exist for an individual or family that wants to select alkaline hydrolysis

for themselves or a loved one is availability – it is not something that is generally available to consumers.’

Koth added that NFDA encourages further study of the alkaline hydrolysis process to fully understand its impact on the environment and the health and safety of funeral professionals and communities.

However, the Cremation Association of North America has recognized alkaline hydrolysis as a form of disposition that is similar to cremation and is including it as a variant of the cremation process. “Our recently revised Model Cremation Law speaks of the ‘mechanical and/or thermal or other dissolution process that reduces human remains to bone fragments,’ which certainly includes alkaline hydrolysis,” said John Ross, CANA executive director. “Further, the application of heat remains a factor given that the solution is heated to 400 degrees F.”

As for the legislative process in California, Achermann said the legislature will adjourn Aug. 31. After that the governor has 39 days to sign the bills on his desk, so the outcome will be known by late September, if not sooner.

Despite California taking care of the leg work in preparation of the new technology, Dan Isard, president of The Foresight Companies, Phoenix, said alkaline hydrolysis is “at least 10 years away from the real world. The investment is huge and ultimately the consumer is going to pay for it,” he said. “Very few eco-consumers are going to pay 400 to 600 percent more for alkaline hydrolysis rather than a cremation. State law allowing it and consumers and professionals understanding it is a long way away, if it ever comes to be.”

Preparing for the Next Wave

As individuals live more environmentally conscious lives, the more likely these feelings will continue into how they are remembered with baby boomers once again leading the charge. The development of the alkaline hydrolysis process comes on the heels of a move toward burial in “green” cemeteries where the bodies are not embalmed and a buried in a biodegradable container such as a wicker basket and lowered into the ground.

“Green proponents will get laws passed to permit alkaline hydrolysis, I mean, who would dare argue against being green?” asked Mike Kubasak, Kubasak Associates, Mesquite, Nev. He commented on what he called an amazing turn of events over the last 40 years. “In the 1970s, cremation was being pushed by some people because they saw earth burial as a threat to the environment,” he said. “Now, it’s cremation, or fossil-fuel cremation being touted as the threat to the environment”

With only about 10 percent of the United States even legally allowed to offer alkaline hydrolysis, the best thing that a funeral director can do, in the words of one funeral director, is keep your ear to the ground.

“The reason that I keep my ear to the ground, and I may have to keep it there a long time, is I don’t want to be too quick to discount any new idea, because you hate to make the mistakes of the past like when it came to cremation,” said John Williams, funeral director with Farley Funeral Homes and Crematory, with locations in Venice, North Port and Englewood, Fla. Williams, who is also president of the Florida Funeral Directors Association, said that for a long time as consumer interest in cremation was growing, the funeral profession “kept their heads in the sand for so long, [and] really kind of missed the opportunity to embrace what people wanted and master it, perfect it and do right by people.”

Nixon agrees. “Funeral directors can’t abdicate their duty to be knowledgeable and informed like they did with cremation,” he said. “It is kind of like the green movement, if funeral directors aren’t at least informed or aware they will be passed by.”

What’s in a Name?

What’s in a Name? Well, it depends who you ask. If you are exploring purchasing a unit from BioSAFE Engineering, the process is called “water resolution.” If you are looking at what is offered by Matthews International, the process is referred to as “bio-cremation.” A Scottish company, Resomation, which has been in operation since 2007 and in 2008 partnered with Matthews, calls the process, well, Resomation. The generic, scientific term used to describe the process is called alkaline hydrolysis.

Said Curt Rostad, “By definition cremation involves heat and/or fire. Decomposition (that’s biological), cremation and alkaline hydrolysis all have an end result of bone and bone fragments. The variable is method and time to accomplish it. But that does not make them the same process so you can’t use any of the terms to describe the other.”

According to Joe Sehee, executive director of the Green Burial Council, Santa Fe, N.M., funeral directors need to be able to present these offerings to the public and stand behind whatever is being purported. “We shouldn’t be judging,” Sehee said. “That was the mistake that was made trying to diminish cremation as being a less than decent form of disposition. It didn’t do families or the funeral service community any good. That is why I think that green burial is being treated with kid gloves to some degree. If the market wants this, it is going to get it so we shouldn’t stand in the way of it.”

Alkaline hydrolysis offers the same service options as with traditional burial or flame base cremation. Schaal noted that meaningful and appropriate services must remain front and center in the educational process. “We see bio-cremation offering the same platform for creative services but the education will remain in the hands of the funeral professional,” he said. “With bio-technology, it will not consume a traditional casket (burial or cremation) so the requirement of a specially made ‘rental insert’ is necessary. Matthews has designed a stainless steel insert that fits into any rental casket that will allow for visitation and can go directly from the rental into the Bio cremator.”

Curt Rostad, executive director of the Indiana Funeral Directors Association, said he could only assume that the memorialization component will be identical. “Those funeral directors that have done a good job showing that cremation is not ‘instead of a funeral’ will do a good job with hydrolysis too.”

To illustrate his point, Rostad recalled a newspaper article he saw where a funeral director commented on the effect of the recession on the funeral business. The funeral director said: “Some people can’t afford a funeral so they are choosing cremation.” Said Rostad, “That’s the guy that is in trouble regardless of the process used.”

Williams said he is not sure whether alkaline hydrolysis is going to have a mainstream appeal or will become a kind of a boutique way to appeal to a niche of folks. Regardless, he said funeral directors need to learn from the mistakes made when cremation was starting to gain in popularity and have the conversation with any interested families.

“Funeral service forgot to include as part of the story where the memorialization process plays into it,” Williams said. “They got fixated on the actual disposition and not what leads up to it. The meaning and the value was never on the table during the discussion.”

Williams said that some funeral homes will make the investment in alkaline hydrolysis right off the bat and he will be watching very closely. “A lot of our efforts and energies will continue to go into talking about the meaning and the value of the funeral and memorialization,” Williams said. “We’ll put more of our eggs in that basket than we are in the actual process of crematory vs. bio-cremation.”

First Ones in the Pool

The first ones in the pool to offer alkaline hydrolysis will be setting the bar on pricing — taking into account the size of their investment, the likely number of families interested in the process and competition, among other factors. Nixon believes that the early entrants into the market should adopt high-end pricing, considering the risks associated with cremation (fire or water) are higher than for earth burial. “They are going to have to recoup the initial investment,” he said. “If operators are smart they will charge accordingly and try to recoup their investment. It is going to take quite a while to get a return on investment of that magnitude. I think you price it high to start with, especially if you are the only one in the area.”

Rostad sees little choice for funeral homes that invest in the technology other than to base initial pricing on costs. “Right now, the major cost is in equipment,” he said. “I understand [the number] of man hours required [for the process] is similar and the cost of gas vs. chemicals is within a few dollars of each other. If public acceptance of the process grows and the units become more mass produced, we can expect the cost to eventually come down so maybe the costs will be comparable.”

But therein lies the real question: What level of public acceptance will this method receive? Rostad believes that alkaline hydrolysis will have a public relations or public perception issue. “I’ve heard it referred to as the ‘yuck’ factor,” he said. “Cremation has a historical basis. Even though much of that history has a negative context, that has largely been overcome and it is widely accepted here and abroad. Some even view the return of the elements back to nature in the form of fire to be spiritual or comforting.

“But hydrolysis has no history while flame is acceptable to a lot of people,” Rostad continued. “It’s a little harder to put into acceptable terminology that their loved one is going to be dissolved and put down the drain, or as some suggest, recycled as fertilizer.”

Robert Fells, external chief operating officer and general counsel for ICCFA, concurred with Rostad's point. "If the proponents want this method to advance, they should develop an accurate summary of what happens," Fells said. "Even with traditional cremation, consumers are not necessarily aware of the 'pulverizing' part. I think consumer disclosure would be key where alkaline hydrolysis is offered. Providers could be running a risk of potential liability by not disclosing how the process works. In other words, 'I didn't know you were going to do *that* to Mom!'"

Nixon said that funeral homes not interested in the alkaline hydrolysis would describe the process much differently than those who are. "The people who don't have a unit will combat a competitor with a unit, they will be using the word 'flush' in reference to the liquid remains going down the drain," he said. "The idea of flushing grandma down the drain isn't a pretty picture."

Brad Crain, president of BioSAFE Engineering, knows what to expect from opponents of the process. "Naysayers will make it sound pretty gruesome," Crain said. "We're returning organic components of the body back to the ecosystem just like nature intended. Ashes to ashes — we're accelerating the natural decomposition."

Schaal said he views alkaline hydrolysis as a form of cremation. "But instead of the catalyst being nature or propane fuel, the catalyst is 95 percent water with 5 percent potassium hydroxide."

"We're providing our funeral professionals an option for the cremation consumer who wants a more environmental process that lowers greenhouse gases, lowers the use of natural resources, etc.," Schaal added. "I think it's fascinating that at least in my 20-plus years in funeral service, we're talking about providing a service that is actually relevant in today's market. Normally we are several steps behind the consumer but with this opportunity, we are step in step."

Schaal said that in Matthews' consumer research completed last fall, the overwhelming majority recognizes that in order to be environmentally driven — it comes with a price. "We see this bio-cremation service coming with a premium over traditional flame because of the capital investment. In our research, we found the tipping point for the consumer who would pay a premium for a 'direct cremation' was at roughly +\$500. They made it clear that the environmental advantages must be spelled out within the education so that they can justify needing to spend more. If the environmental advantages are +10 percent but the cost is +50 percent, the math doesn't work. We need to remain respectful with the expectations."

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More Observers Weigh in on 'Prohibition' in the Funeral Home

TRENTON, N.J. — In last week's issue of the Memorial Business Journal was a discussion on the status of food in the funeral home. A whopping majority of the states (45 out of 50) permit food and beverage service during a visitation in a funeral home. While New York is conducting member opinion research and there is a legal challenge in federal court challenging the provisions Pennsylvania's Funeral Director Law, which includes the right to offer food and beverage within the funeral home.

New Jersey's food and beverage statute has been on the books since at least 1952 and, like in Connecticut, there has been discussion on the topic with predictable results; some for change, some opposed.

However, most of the comments we received since the article appeared do favor food and beverage service in the funeral home. Nevin Mann, founder and chairman of the management consulting firm Johnson-Woodruff, which is located in Glenside, Pa., said in no uncertain terms, food should be permitted in the funeral home.

"Sharing a meal is part of our culture," Mann said. "Eating together brings us closer to one another, perhaps because we tend to listen more when our mouths have food in them. In states where food in funeral homes is permitted, progressive service providers have integrated serving food with different funeral rituals and have had very positive feedback from families. Prohibiting food in funeral homes could be considered anti-competitive by providers that want to enhance service quality by serving food."

Alan Creedy, president of Trust 100, shared a personal observation. "My mother died last May in Bennington, Vt., 7 miles from the New York state border," Creedy said. "We had a wonderful catered reception arranged by the funeral director at the funeral home. Had we been located 7 miles east that would have been prohibited and we would have been forced to make other, less convenient, arrangements."

“In addition, my mother was cremated but we arranged for the funeral director to refrigerate her body for three days because she had expressly forbid us to embalm her, and my brother insisted on having her present at the funeral in her body. The funeral director did such a wonderful job of preparing her unembalmed body that the viewing became a highlight and we opened it beyond the private viewing we had originally planned. No harm done. We were very, very pleased. The funeral director had a much, much better sale.”

He added, “The take away here is that these prohibitive laws are not only ridiculous but prevent practitioners in those states from serving the rapidly changing needs and preferences of consumers as well as reaping the corresponding financial rewards. Of course my experience is only one story but I believe the ‘throwback’ thinking behind these regulations only exacerbate a growing disconnect with the public and force them to find alternative vendors to meet their needs.”

Offering a perspective from one of the state’s that do not allow food and beverage to mix with funerals is David Walkinshaw, a retired funeral director and a spokesman for the Massachusetts Funeral Directors Association. “There has been some discussion, on and off over the past few years,” Walkinshaw said. “The state board is in the process of looking at the overall state regulations, looking at different changes and I know that is one that has been contemplated.”

Walkinshaw said a poll of funeral directors in the state would likely be split 50-50 as to those who think it should be changed vs those who think the provision should be left alone. The association does not have a position one way or the other but, as he said, it is something that gets talked about.

“You have one argument from the established smaller funeral homes up here that don’t have the ability or the facilities to do it” he said. “Then some of the bigger funeral homes says it would be a great revenue opportunity as well as an opportunity to enhance service to the family. There is no concensus of opinion either way.”

Walkinshaw said that in Massachusetts are pretty much aware that food and beverage is permitted in funeral homes across the country. “I think what you do run into in New England and on the East Coast is that there are very small operators that look at it as something they can’t afford, they don’t have the facilities for to allow for it and they look at it as if the rule changes they may be placed in a competitive disadvantage, you can understand both sides of the argument.”

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The Notebook

FINE Mortuary College, Norwood, Mass., has announced its Dean’s List for the Spring 2010 term. Thomas Mayo and Madison Sullivan earned High Honors as full-time students. Louis Hebbelinck, David Kelleher, Christine Miller, Kathryn Olander and Daniel White all earned Honors as full-time students. Part-time students who earned High-Honors are: Sean Bowen, John Gentile, Grainne O’Leary, Steve Stonely and Juliann Zinsner. Part-time students who made Honors are: Stacey Alves, James Burt, Jonathan Cain, Amanda Desmarais, Katelyn Estes, Steve Everson, Robert Fisher, Jeffrey Gigliello, Robert Iannotti, Kyle Kokosa, Lee Lavoie, Joey Lovell, Kelley Mahoney-Miller, Tara McCarron, Thomas McNamara, Angelo Nardolillo, Chris Northrop, Heather Reiter, Amanda Soares, Justin Souza, Jonathan Spagnolo and Christopher Todd.

StoneMor Partners, Levittown, Pa., has reported earnings of \$22.03 million in the first quarter ending March compared with a loss of \$865,000 in the corresponding year-earlier quarter. The gain was attributed primarily to the company’s acquisition of nine cemeteries in Michigan (*Memorial Business Journal*, April 1, 2010). StoneMor paid approximately \$14 million for the properties. StoneMor said adjusted operating profit was up \$3.2 million, or 37.9 percent, to \$11.6 million in the quarter. Total revenues were \$40.67 million compared to \$42.60 million last year.

Passages International Inc. has introduced a new program to help funeral homes benefit from the emerging trend of “green funerals.” At the center of the program is aGreenerFuneral.org (AGF), a public service Web site sponsored by Passages International and launched on Earth Day, April 22. aGreenerFuneral.org was created to expand consumer awareness about greener funerals, greener burials and greener cremations. At the same time, it is designed to provide a fast and easy connection between consumers interested in greener funerals and funeral homes that wish to serve them. The site offers consumers a broad and unbiased look at the wide range of greener funeral options. While many green burial sites focus on natural cemeteries, aGreenerFuneral.org also features information on cremation, “bio-cremation,” alternative forms of disposition and greener funeral products. To reach as wide an audience as possible, the site takes the position that green is in the eye of the beholder and broadens its appeal to include the outdoor enthusiast and nature lover as well as the dedicated environmentalist.

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The Chance to Tell the Full Story

With the legislative action in California bringing some attention to the alkaline hydrolysis process, both within the profession and in the consumer media, now seems like as good a time as any to have a discussion on the process which has been called everything from "Cremation Lite" to a real "game changer." In the past week there have been many newspaper articles describing the process. But the bigger story is yet to come.

While the process has had some institutional applications, at medical schools, veterinary schools, etc., let's face it, the process is still in its infancy. No one is calling funeral homes asking the funeral directors to describe the alkaline hydrolysis process. The "wave" referred to in the page 1 headline could conceivably be 10 years away. But question are going to be asked about the same time Matthews unveils its bio-cremation unit in St.Petersburg later this summer.

This will be the opportunity for all of funeral service to tell the story of what could be the next chapter in the disposition of remains. And, the conversation will have legs. Anything that aligns itself with the "green" discussion will earn its share of attention. So be prepared.

Hindsight being 20/20, it is widely acknowledged that funeral service dropped the ball when it came to educating consumers on all things cremation during its advent and climb. The discussion about the memorialization, the ceremony, was lost in a discussion about the process and price. Everybody knew there was fire and ashes but the part of the story that wasn't told was that connection between the process and the service. The newspaper article that Curt Rostad referenced described the disconnect succinctly: A funeral director recently was quoted in a news article (commenting on the effect of the recession on the funeral business) that "Some people can't afford a funeral so they are choosing cremation."

Somewhere years ago a connection was made that allowed cremation to become more synonymous with the word "funeral" rather than it being communicated that it was only a process — an alternative to earth burial for the disposition of the remains. Funeral directors not particularly happy to offer cremation disparaged the process creating an image-rebuilding project that is still underway. The public perception of cremation was marginalized as cheap, immediate and sterile. How could a process that used fire be seen as something so cold?

Cremation customers were sometimes viewed as low-level customers, "You want just a cremation?" Especially now at the ground floor of a new process, there is a tremendous opportunity to put focus back on ceremony as we talk about a new form of disposition.

Many of the people we spoke with see at least one major opportunity for funeral service in a conversation about alkaline hydrolysis and that is the connect the dots to the ceremony and memorialization process while talking about the disposition process. Funeral service forgot to include as part of the story of where the memorialization process plays into it, they got fixated on the actual disposition and not what leads up to it. The meaning and the value were never on the table during the discussion. The conversation may begin about *what* you do, but you can easily steer it toward *why* you do it.

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