

# Chemical cremation gains supporters in N.J.

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THE REC

Alternative to cremation is piquing interest — and raising eyebrows — in New Jersey.

Alkaline hydrolysis uses lye, heat and pressure to dissolve body tissue. The remaining skeleton is ground into a fine, white ash and given to the family. The brownish liquid residue is discharged into the wastewater system.

Yes, down the drain.

Proponents say the water-based process uses far less energy and creates far fewer greenhouse gases than cremation. They say people who have an environmental bent or who cringe at the thought of fire might go for it.

Jeff Tittel, state director of the Sierra Club, sees "potential" in alkaline hydrolysis.

Detractors say: You've got to be kidding.

"I can't even fathom it," said Valerie Vainieri Huttle, director of Vainieri Funeral Home in [North Bergen](#).

"It certainly isn't appealing to me, either as a funeral director or a human being, and I don't know if it's appealing to anyone else."

Huttle's opinion matters. The assemblywoman from [Englewood](#) is one of two licensed funeral directors in the Legislature. Alkaline hydrolysis, sometimes referred to as bio cremation or chemical cremation, is legal in six states, but not New Jersey. For it to be legal here, state law would have to recognize alkaline hydrolysis as a mode for the final disposition of human remains, along with burial, entombment, cremation and body donation.

## Florida home a pioneer

For now, there's no move afoot to bring alkaline hydrolysis to New Jersey, and Huttle says lawmakers haven't been approached. But the process is creating buzz because a St. Petersburg, Fla., funeral home this month will become the first in the nation to offer it.

Anderson-McQueen Funeral Home, which operates a crematory, has installed the necessary

## Legal in ...

*Alkaline hydrolysis is legal in these states:*

Florida  
Kansas  
Maine  
Maryland  
Minnesota  
Oregon

equipment and will offer alkaline hydrolysis at \$100 more than cremation.

John McQueen, owner of the 60-year-old business, said he has received mostly positive feedback from consumers. The fact that the liquid remains, which are said to be sterile and contain no human DNA, are sent into the wastewater system is not a major disincentive, he noted.

Funeral professionals in New Jersey will be watching the developments in St. Petersburg.

"It's wait-and-see," said Robert C. Moore, manager of Moore's Home for Funerals in [Wayne](#) and a past president of the New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association. Alkaline hydrolysis, he added, "is something the public will need to be comfortable with and a demand must be created before the profession starts to get involved in pursuing it."

Asked about the destination of the liquid remains, he said: "Isn't it the same philosophy as the loved one going up the chimney? It's how you perceive the process. I've had people tell me they're more comfortable [with alkaline hydrolysis] than with flamed-based cremation because of their feelings about fire."

The state association has not taken a position on alkaline hydrolysis, but the National Funeral Directors Association this summer adopted a policy recognizing it as a dignified way of disposing of human remains, as long as it is authorized by state law, properly regulated and fully explained to survivors of the deceased.

#### **Hurdles in N.J.**

Alkaline hydrolysis could face hurdles in New Jersey because the funeral industry here is highly regulated. Funeral homes are barred from operating crematories. Cemeteries are barred from operating funeral homes, but they can run crematories. Who would perform the process?

"Is [alkaline hydrolysis] a form of cremation? That depends on who you talk to," said Adam Guziejewski, the state association's director of government affairs. "Some industry experts consider it similar to cremation; some consider it a little more icky than cremation. Some take the literal definition of cremation to be heat and flame. Others may take a different view."

Cremation and alkaline hydrolysis have one thing in common: At the end, families get ashes to bury, scatter or keep.

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