



THE GREEN PAGES

ENVIRONMENT

Coffin boffin's green afterlife

The funeral world is set for a shake up as eco-friendly options become available

by Angela Gregory
environment reporter

Green is becoming the new black in the funeral world as New Zealanders turn to more environmentally sensitive burials.

The new services range from eco-coffins and natural burial to alternative ways of preserving the body.

Auckland Christy Foote, owner of The Natural Funeral Company, says she started her business five years ago to meet a growing demand for less invasive and simpler procedures.

Ms Foote, who had previously worked as a funeral director for traditional firms, said many clients did not want the bodies embalmed, which meant the deceased could remain at home rather than be sent to a funeral parlour.

Blocks of dry ice were instead placed in the coffin to keep the body cool and oils such as frankincense, ti

COFFIN CHOICES

\$650 Cardboard

\$1100 Basket

\$1100 Veneer

\$1200 Solid pine

tree and eucalyptus were used to help preserve and scent the body.

She said interest in natural funerals had increased in the past five years and reflected New Zealanders "huge bent towards things green".

While most of her clients still opted for cremation there was also interest in burials like at the eco-



BOX CLEVER: Greg Holdsworth in one of the Return to Sender eco-coffins that his company manufactures.

PICTURE / MARTIN SYKES

section of the Waikumete Cemetery in Glen Eden where people could be buried in a woollen shroud fixed to a solid base or in a natural container with no metal fittings. Headstones were not allowed but a tree could be planted to mark the grave.

Caskets used for such natural funerals included cardboard, untreated pine or macrocarpa, and basket-woven wicker.

Ms Foote said there were concerns about mdf-veneer caskets as they could give off dioxins when burned.

Unitec graduate Greg Holdsworth was prompted to look at designing eco-coffins following his dissatisfac-

tion at what was available when family members passed away.

The award winning "return to sender" coffins with organic curves were made from plywood.

They retailed at about \$2000 and Mr Holdsworth was only just keeping up with demand.

"Even traditional firms are embracing them."

In Wellington a natural burial cemetery will open in a couple of months on former farmland next to the Makara Cemetery.

Mark Blackham, founder of the non-profit Natural Burials organisation, said the eco-cemetery had been

developed in co-operation with the Wellington City Council.

The deceased would be buried in untreated softwood caskets with rope handles which would break down relatively easily.

The bodies, which could not be embalmed, would be buried less than a metre deep where the soil was more active to increase decomposition.

Mr Blackham said there were 300 members of Natural Burials and about 50 people had signed up to be buried at the Makara site.

Such burials were growing in popularity in the United Kingdom which had nearly 120 of the cem-

eteries.

Mr Blackham said research here indicated up to a third of New Zealanders would prefer a natural burial.

But Neil Little, vice-president of the Funeral Directors Association, said he had not noticed an upswell of interest in eco-style funerals and queried what they actually meant.

Mr Little said traditional funeral practices were not in his view detrimental to the environment and funeral homes were sensitive to individual's wishes.

He had recently complied with a family request that the deceased not be embalmed.