

# Eternally green: New eco-friendly cremations and burials

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People who care about improving the environment in life may soon be able to do so after death. Entrepreneurs in Europe have developed two new and unusual methods of body disposal — including a low-heat cremation method and a corpse compost method that turns bodies into soil — that could provide environmentally friendly alternatives to those now in use. That's the topic of an article in the current issue of Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN), ACS' weekly newsmagazine.

C&EN Associate Editor Sarah Everts notes that environmentally minded individuals have several concerns about cremation and burial practices. The high temperature of cremation burns up lots of fuel and releases carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere. Cremation also releases mercury from dental fillings into the air. Some worry that formaldehyde and other toxic substances that undertakers use to prepare bodies for burial can leach into the environment.

Entrepreneurs have developed two green alternatives that are soon launching in North America or Europe. They include a new cremation method that breaks down a corpse using a highly corrosive alkaline substance rather than extremely high heat. Because the temperatures used in the new process is also 80 percent cooler than standard cremation temperatures, the process uses less energy and produces lower carbon dioxide emissions.

A newly developed burial method allows corpses to be composted (decomposed) into [soil](#) instead of transforming to dust in a sealed casket.

The unusual process involves freezing the body in liquid nitrogen, breaking it into smaller pieces, and freeze-drying the parts, which are then placed in a biodegradable coffin for burial. Over time, the body turns into soil instead of undergoing the standard decaying process. "No matter how you look at it, there's just no pretty way to go," said one of the entrepreneurs.

**More information:** This story is available at [pubs.acs.org/cen/science/88/8826sci2.html](https://pubs.acs.org/cen/science/88/8826sci2.html)

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