

Mr. Andrew Van Dusen
Maryland State Funeral Directors Association
Association Administrator
Millersville, Maryland

Dear Mr. Van Dusen:

I have been asked to give my opinion on the safe operations of crematories. My background in crematory operations goes as far back as 1975 and I have personally cremated and assisted in cremating over ten thousand decedents. Cremation certainly is not a fad since the first crematory was established in 1876 in Washington, Pennsylvania. The National Funeral Directors Association, the world's largest funeral director association with over twenty thousand members in forty-nine countries predicts the national cremation average will be 70.6% by the year 2030. Currently there are four thousand crematories in the United States.

Funeral Directors are now providing more cremation than burial services to the families they serve and at a deeply discounted price. Cremations are not going to become less popular; they are going to increase dramatically.

That brings us to the question that Maryland House Bill 1374 is trying to enact. Basically, are crematories a hazard to the environment I read with bewilderment that this Act "is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety". As I previously alluded to, I have worked in a crematory since 1975 and have cremated over ten thousand decedents and I have never had any illnesses related to operating a cremator. One would think if the person who is performing the cremations has never become ill from emissions, then why should the public who lives next door to a crematory have any worries.

Particulate emissions (PM) are released into the air in several ways, cars, trucks, and even fireplaces, but do we need to point the finger at crematories who have emission controls to limit the amount of emissions released into the atmosphere. Modern day crematories have now been equipped with computers that control and oversee the cremation. Industry officials have determined that crematories are safe and meet all government air-quality standards.

Another concern regarding emissions being released is Mercury (Hg) that is being attributed to amalgam fillings in the decedent's teeth. The American Dental Association (ADA) that oversees dentists throughout the US has stated that the use of silver amalgam has dropped from 68% to less than 30% eliminating the already minimal amounts of Hg into the atmosphere. The USEPA has determined Hg emissions are not deemed sufficient to be regulated. One can assume with the everyday changes in the dental profession that silver amalgams will be eliminated in the near future.

Research and tests have been conducted in several parts of the world to determine the amount of emissions released into the atmosphere and even scientists have determined that it is not a risk to live next to a crematory. Some have recommended that the funeral home or crematory extract the teeth with fillings prior to the cremation. Anyone onboard with that idea? Decisions on allowing a crematory to operate within one thousand feet should be made on the data collected and intellectually interpreted and not an uproar of a neighborhood, school, or an extended living facility.

The State of Maryland does an excellent job in overseeing the operation of a crematory. Any person who performs a cremation must receive their certification to do so. Receiving a certification requires said person to attend a one day eight-hour program on the proper operating procedures of a cremator, and then pass a fifty-question exam. I would like to add that this course costs \$525.00. Having an operator certified gives them a better idea of how the equipment is designed and how to perform a cremation. Having a certified operator and a well-maintained machine will reduce, if not eliminate emission problems.

Handcuffing funeral homes and crematories by not issuing new permits and not renewing old permits is not the answer and will present a hardship to those entities and the families they serve.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Nicodemus

Vice President Cremation Services

National Funeral Directors Association