



When a Death Occurs in Pittsburgh What to Do First — A Practical Guide for Families

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From the Desk of Frank Perman

When a death occurs, families often say the same thing: “I don’t know where to begin.” That feeling is completely normal. Some decisions must be made quickly. Others can wait. This guide was written to help you understand the difference — calmly and clearly. You do not need to know everything today. You do not need to decide everything today. My hope is that this resource gives you clarity and steady footing during a difficult time. If at any point you would prefer to speak directly, we are available 24 hours a day.

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What To Do First

- If a death occurs at home: Call 911 (if the decedent was not under hospice care), contact hospice nurse if applicable, then contact the funeral home.
- If a death occurs in a hospital or facility: Staff will guide initial steps. You may choose the funeral home you prefer. Let the facility know that we are the funeral home of record.
- You will need: Full legal name, date of birth, Social Security number, place of birth, parents' names (including mother's maiden name), and military discharge papers if applicable.

Decisions That Must Be Made Soon

- Burial or cremation
- Whether there will be a viewing or gathering
- Clothing for your loved one
- Cemetery information (if applicable)
- Religious or clergy involvement

Decisions That Can Wait

- Headstone or monument selection
- Permanent urn selection
- Reception details
- Obituary refinements
- Thank-you cards
- Memorial donations

Understanding Cremation in Pennsylvania

Cremation reduces the body to bone fragments through intense heat. It occurs after required legal authorizations are completed. In Pennsylvania:

- Legal next-of-kin must authorize cremation.
- County approval is required.
- Only one individual is cremated at a time.

Cremation does not eliminate the opportunity for viewing, memorial gathering, or religious service.

Why Cremation Prices Vary In Pittsburgh

Cremation pricing varies depending on what is included. Lower advertised

prices often include basic transportation, required paperwork, refrigeration, and the cremation process. Full-service funeral homes may include professional preparation, personal property verification, permit handling, licensed oversight, facility use, and transparent itemized pricing.

Preplanning: A Gift to Your Family

Preplanning allows you to make decisions without urgency, clearly document your wishes, reduce emotional stress on your family, and lock in pricing for a limited period where applicable. Planning ahead is not about dwelling on death. It is about removing uncertainty.

Veterans Benefits

Veterans may be eligible for military funeral honors, U.S. flag presentation, government-issued headstone or marker, and burial in national or state veterans cemeteries. A DD-214 discharge paper is required to confirm eligibility.

Vital Statistics:

This is the information that is needed for the necessary documents for a deceased human.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip Code: _____

Municipality: _____

County: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Gender: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Occupation (not retired): _____

Business/Industry: _____

Level of Education Completed: _____

Military Service: _____

Marital Status: _____

Maiden Name: _____

Name of Spouse: _____

Father's Name: _____

Mother's Name (including maiden
name): _____

Racial Designations: _____

My Preferences for the Location of the
Visitation, Service, or Celebration of
Life:

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Place of Worship: _____

Address of Place of Worship: _____

Other: _____

Address of Other Location: _____

A Final Word

There is no single “right way” to honor a life. Every person and every family is different. Every service should reflect that. If we can assist you — whether today or sometime in the future — we are available.

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