



Metals and Cremation Policy

How recycling of surgical metals gives back to our community through subsidies and awareness activities.

Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (NSW) is participating in an Orthometals program that creates the opportunity to recycle surgical metals remaining after cremation. Funds raised are being directed towards families using Eastern Suburbs or Woronora Memorial Park's services, who have experienced the loss of a child up to and including 17 years of age, pre-term and stillborn children. This program is called "Aidan's Legacy", named after a 3 year old boy residing in Karinya Gardens, one of Woronora Memorial Park's children's areas. The program also assists with costs associated to services which use our facilities of all children in our Nation who have passed without family heritage. The subsidy is provided to raise awareness for the annual Pregnancy & Infant Loss Remembrance Day held on the 15th October and the Baby Lily Grace Awareness Day, held each year on the 29th April.

If your loved one has had an orthopaedic implant during their lifetime, and you have not provided any specific instructions, you may wonder what happens to the metals after cremation.

When a coffin or casket is cremated, the majority of metal components that have been surgically implanted (i.e. prosthetic or orthopaedic devices such as artificial joints, plates or screws) are not destroyed during cremation. These surgical metal components combine with the metal remains from the coffin or casket (staples, screws, hinges etc.) that remain after the cremation process.

When most people consider recycling, we think about paper, plastic or glass. It is also possible to recycle metals and this may include the various metals used in items such as artificial joints. The metals used for implants are special medical grade stainless steel, titanium, tungsten and cobalt chrome. All are produced from non-renewable resources and all have recyclable value.

Why Recycle?

Until 2013, unless a family requests otherwise, metal items left over from cremation were aggregated and buried in the grounds of the cemetery. A very small percentage of families ask for the cremation metal to be returned, however the vast majority do not. When asked, such items are provided to the family.

The decision to recycle surgical metals remaining after cremation is an environmentally responsible one. It reduces the amount of landfill material and also helps ensure that use of non-renewable resources is minimised. The fact that all proceeds raised provide a free cremation, chapel service or a burial subsidy to a family using our services, who has lost a baby, infant or child as well as support the Pregnancy & Infant Loss and Baby Lily Grace Awareness Days, means that the recycling does provide both an environmental and a broader social benefit.

Recycling of metals remaining after cremation is now fully accepted in numerous countries across Europe, including the UK and also in some states of the USA. Hundreds of cremation facilities participate with a combined amount of hundreds of tonnes of metals being recycled, per annum.

Where do the metals go?

Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (NSW) has partnered with Austeng Pty Ltd, a Melbourne company for the collection and shipping of these metals to OrthoMetals, a fully certified and registered company with a strong history and experience in conducting the collection and recycling of metals for crematoria worldwide, including Australia.

Once the metals are received by OrthoMetals, they are recycled in the form of granulates to the original material. The process is a guaranteed recycling system to ensure that all orthopaedic implants are not able to be re-used.

What happens to the money raised by recycling?

The recycling of these metals does generate funds. From the 15th of May 2014, any proceeds raised from metals collected from Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (NSW) have been allocated to provide families who have experienced the loss of a child up to and including 17 years of age, pre-term and stillborn children with a cremation and chapel service at Eastern Suburbs or Woronora Memorial Park, at no charge, as well as a burial subsidy, should a family choose burial over cremation at one of our cemeteries. The program is called "Aidan's Legacy" named after a 3 year old boy now residing in Karinya Gardens, one of Woronora Memorial Park's children's areas.

Many families have utilised Aidan's Legacy. In addition to these families, hundreds of early pregnancy loss babies have been delivered from hospitals, all of whom have been cremated at no charge. As an opportunity to provide further dignity, since 2016 at Eastern Suburbs and since 2015 at Woronora Memorial Park, monthly chapel services have been provided for early pregnancy loss, including a gift of a teddy bear to each family who attends such services. The families are advised of the "Babies with wings" services via appropriate hospital staff. Services for families suffering from early pregnancy loss allows formal farewells to children of less than 20 weeks gestation. After the services, all babies are cremated on the same day with the opportunity for family to be part of subsequent ash scatterings which take place a few days after the services in special parts of the cemeteries.

What if I want the metal items returned to me or my family?

Unless otherwise indicated prior to the cremation occurring, all metal items remaining after cremation will be recycled. However, if you would like to have the particular item returned to you, please advise your Funeral Director prior to the cremation. Our staff will make arrangements to keep the item and have it returned at a time of memorialising or collecting the cremated remains.

Please note that soft/precious metals melt during the cremation process and are dispersed throughout the remains of the cremator and are reduced to tiny granules. These cannot be recovered and returned to the family so it is recommended that all jewellery is removed prior to cremation.

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