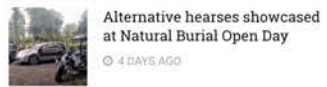


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## Funeral profession urged to ditch chipboard coffins to cut cremation emissions

Around 98 percent of coffins used in cremation are made from veneered particleboard or MDF

by Shekina Tuahene - August 7, 2018 in Current Affairs, Technology/Equipment



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Britain could massively reduce the amount of pollution caused by cremations if more environmentally-friendly materials were used in the construction of coffins, research from coffin manufacturer LifeArt has found.

Currently, around 98 percent of coffins used in cremation are made from veneered particleboard or MDF, dubbed by some experts as the "new asbestos". Independent tests have revealed that switching from MDF or particleboard coffins to new paper-based products could reduce these greenhouse gas emissions and toxic particles, including CO2 and NOx, by up to 97 percent.

Currently, there are around 450,000 cremations in the UK each year, which leads to the burning of around 17 million kg of MDF or particleboard.

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Results of cremation tests, which were conducted by the UK's largest cremator manufacturer, Leeds based Facultative Technologies, were released in the wake of the government's recent announcement on its Clean Air Strategy, which included measures to crackdown on polluting fuels including those used in wood-burning stoves and diesel engines.

Simon Rothwell, managing director of LifeArt Coffins, said the funeral profession could play an important part in doing its bit to improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and save trees.

"Our tests reinforce the fact that burning chipboard coffins is environmentally harmful and doing it on the scale that we are through cremations in the UK makes little sense. There have been paper-based coffins on the market for many years but chipboard coffins have continued to dominate because until now it has been impossible to replicate the look, functionality and low cost of a veneered chipboard

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impossible to replicate the look, functionality and low cost of a veneered chipboard coffin," Rothwell said.

Facultative Technologies, UK cremator manufacturer, added: "NOx is a serious greenhouse gas pollutant and is produced during all forms of combustion through the burning of nitrogen bearing materials at high temperature. The more nitrogen present, the higher the levels of NOx produced. In cremations, a significant amount of nitrogen comes directly from the materials from which the coffin is manufactured, and there are very high levels found in MDF, particleboard and chipboard materials.

"The complete combustion of a typical cremation produces the same levels of NOx as a car travelling 3,650 km (2,268) or Barcelona to Moscow. The simplest, and one of the most effective ways to significantly reduce the production of NOx and to help reduce air pollution is to cremate less of these types of coffins and to use materials which are proven to reduce NOx emissions."

It continued: "Toxic air is responsible for 400,000 premature deaths across Europe each year and there is a growing focus on NOx reduction throughout governments across Europe and in the UK. We see our responsibility to the death care industry to do whatever is necessary to reduce the cremation of harmful materials for the benefit of our local communities and ultimately safeguard our planet."

So far, LifeArt coffins have been adopted by a number of Co-op funeral directors, as part of their commitment to reducing their carbon footprints. This includes Lincolnshire Co-op, an independent co-op based in Lincolnshire and surrounding counties. It runs 21 funeral homes and arrangement offices, and South Lincolnshire Crematorium.

David Dernley, head of funerals at Lincolnshire Co-op, said: "At most funeral homes families have to pay twice as much for an eco-coffin compared to veneered chipboard. We are proud to be one of the first to provide affordable environmentally-friendly wood-effect coffins for our families as this fits with Lincolnshire Co-op's purpose and approach. We don't want bereaved families having to pay a premium to protect the environment.

"The other great thing about this new technology is that whilst it is capable of producing a high-quality traditional wood-effect, we are also able to produce high definition picture coffins that allow families to reflect the life of the person whilst again still protecting the environment."

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### Shekina Tuahene

Shekina is a multimedia journalist who is happiest when listening to music or watching a true crime documentary. This Ghanaian-blooded London born girl also loves to travel, drink and socialise with friends. Drop her a line if you have any stories.

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