

US Burial Statistics 2014

Courtesy of Mary Woodsen, Green Burial Council

Each year in the US, we bury:

- 4.3 million gallons of embalming fluid (827,060 gallons of which is formaldehyde)
- 64,500 tons of steel
- 20 million board feet of hardwood for caskets
- 1.6 million tons of concrete

Embalming fluid/formaldehyde

The original amount of 827,060 gallons referred to formaldehyde in the embalming fluid, not embalming fluid itself: embalming fluid is 2 - 4% formaldehyde — that would be about 4.3 million gallons. Note that while the science is out on the danger to groundwater contamination...one thing's pretty clear: it's not good for morticians' health — they breathe the stuff. Which is the main reason the GBC says no embalming fluid except for one product made entirely of essential oils.

Metal/Hardwood/Concrete

Because cremation is spiking, metal caskets are tanking. Now we're at 64,500 tons of steel instead of 104,272. Copper and bronze I'm not sure of; they're such a small part of the market I just ignored them this time around. Back in 2001, 30 million board feet of hardwoods in caskets — that was the trickiest stat I had to track down; I actually found numbers ranging from 30 to 60 million board feet and, being a science writer, opted for the conservative figure. Now it looks to be about 20 million board feet: fewer caskets (cremation again) and manufacturers using thinner stock (trying to save money — and geez, you don't need two- or three-inch thick caskets anyway, for pity's sake). Vaults: that number hasn't gone down much. It's about 1.6 million tons.

For more information, go to:

<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-1jjDYsPz7MQ/UcTtwMSBI7I/AAAAAAAAAGI/HvRzHM21VG0/s1600/GBC+infographic+.png>

About Mary Woodsen

Mary Woodsen originally published her findings in 2001 under the auspices of the Pre-Posthumous Society, Ithaca, NY. She is now a researcher for the Green Burial Council, the nonprofit that sets standards for green burial in the US and offers certification of green funeral goods and services. Woodsen is Founding President of Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, located in the rolling hilltop meadows south of Cayuga Lake in New York's Finger Lakes Region; a science writer for Cornell University; and member of the Finger Lakes Land Trust, the Society of Environmental Journalists, the Society of Conservation Biology, and the National Association of Science Writers.