Shallow Burial

Summary This Policy Directive provides the policy to be observed by Public Health Unit authorised officers in receipt of an application for burial of a body in a coffin less than the depth below the natural surface level permitted by the Public Health Regulation 2012.

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Audience Public Health Unit Directors, authorised officers of Public Health Units

Secretary, NSW Health
This Policy Directive may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Compliance with this directive is mandatory for NSW Health and is a condition of subsidy for public health organisations.
SHALLOW BURIAL

PURPOSE

This document provides the procedures to be followed by Local Health District Public Health Units in receipt of an application to bury a body in a grave shallower than that permitted by Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012.

The design, structure and materials used for a shallow burial need to avoid subsidence when the coffin deteriorates, prevent feral animals from entering the grave and prevent the escape of decomposition odours.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

- A person who wishes to bury the body of a deceased person in a shallow grave must seek the approval of the Director – General or delegate.
- A grave liner must be constructed when the depth of burial is reduced from the required 900 millimetres below the natural surface level.
- The body of the deceased person must be contained in a coffin or casket.
- The distance from the top of the lid of the grave liner to the natural ground surface shall not be less than 400 millimetres.
- A person requesting to bury the body of a deceased person in a shallow grave must complete an Application for Shallow Burial, provided at Attachment 2 of the Shallow Burial: Procedures, and is required to provide their personal details, their relationship to the deceased, the deceased date of death, the reason for the shallow burial, the material covering the shallow burial, plans and methodology, proposed date of interment and name and contact details of the cemetery where the burial is to take place.
- The Authorised Officer in the Local Health District Public Health Unit is responsible for assessing the application in relation to any public health risk and approval or rejection of the application.
- The Council or Cemetery Authority must record satisfactory compliance and shall notify the public health unit within 14 days of the interment. The ‘mandatory requirements’ section of the policy statement articulates what must be undertaken to achieve the objectives of the policy.

IMPLEMENTATION

Authorised Officers in Local Health District Public Health Units are responsible for:

- Assessing an application to bury a body at less than 900 millimetres
- Ensuring that the body of the deceased person is in a coffin or casket
- Ensuring that the distance from the top of the lid of the grave liner to the natural surface is not less than 400 millimetres.
REVISION HISTORY

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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 About this document

This document provides procedures to be followed by Local Health District’s Public Health Units upon receipt of an application to bury a body in a grave shallower than permitted by clause 64 of the Public Health Regulation 2012.

This document provides information on the circumstances that may lead to a shallow burial, the design requirements including examples of material and methods for a shallow burial and provides application and approval templates for both Public Health Units and Councils and Cemetery Authorities.

1.2 Key definitions

Authorised Officer – means a person who is appointed as an authorised officer under section 126 of the Public Health Act 2010.

Body – means the body of a dead person but does not include the cremated remains of the person, (Clause 49 of the Public Health Regulation 2012).

Cemetery Authority – means the person or body that directs the operation of a cemetery, (Clause 49 of the Public Health Regulation 2012).

1.3 Legal and legislative framework

This Policy Directive is underpinned by Clause 64 of the Public Health Regulation 2012 which provides that ‘unless otherwise approved a person who buries a body contained in a coffin must place that coffin so that its upper surface is not less than 900 millimetres below the natural surface level of soil where it is buried.

A person who wishes to bury the body of a deceased person in a shallow grave must seek the approval from the Director General, or delegate. The Director General’s authority under Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012 has been delegated (PH306 page 8.60) including to a Local Health District’s Public Health Unit Director or Public Health Officer.

2 CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY LEAD TO A SHALLOW BURIAL

Circumstances leading to a shallow burial may include:

- A reduction in overall depth of burial due to a geographical feature of the land
- A second or third burial: when a grave is opened for a second or third burial the excavation shall be made so as to leave a layer of undisturbed earth at a level to be determined at the time
- The land has been filled and a reduction in burial depth is needed to allow burial in the fill: the fill material needs to be suitable for the operation of a cemetery in that a grave could be prepared without it collapsing. The soil and its use as fill should not permit decomposition leachate to percolate to the surface of slopes or enter any streams or intermittent water courses.
3 DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

The design, structure and materials used for a shallow burial need to avoid subsidence when the coffin deteriorates, prevent feral animals entering the grave, or prevent the escape of decomposition odours.

A grave liner must be constructed when the depth of burial is reduced from the mandatory 900mm. The materials used for this purpose should be impervious. A typical example of materials and method of a shallow burial grave lining construction are compressed cement sheeting liners, which is outlined in Attachment 1 together with other alternatives.

The body of the deceased person must be contained in a coffin or casket.

The distance from the top of the lid of the grave liner to the natural ground surface shall not be less than 400mm, and should be as deep as possible.

4 APPROVAL PROCESS

Approval by the appropriate authority for a shallow burial under the Public Health Regulation 2012 may be given by an exchange of facsimile, email or formal mail. The appropriate authority in this instance is the Public Health Unit in the area in which the body of the deceased will be buried. Contact details for Public Health Units are provided on the NSW Health website at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Pages/phus.aspx

The applicant should provide the information requested in the application form and plan and methodology of the interment.

Additionally, within fourteen days of the interment, the Council or Cemetery Authority, is to record satisfactory compliance with the requirement, and shall forward notification to the Public Health Unit. A plan shall also be kept by the Council or the Cemetery Authority as appropriate to record all shallow burials.

5 LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

The following documents are attached:

- **Attachment 1** Typical use of compressed cement sheeting liners for shallow burial
- **Attachment 2** Application form Shallow Burial Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012
- **Attachment 3** Example briefing note to request approval of the Shallow Burial of a body
- **Attachment 4** Example letter to applicant
- **Attachment 5** Example letter to Cemetery Authority
- **Attachment 6** Example of letter to record satisfactory compliance with the requirements which may be used by the Cemetery Authority
- **Attachment 7** Diagram 1 – Example – Grave liner for a shallow burial
- **Attachment 8** Diagram 2 – Example – Grave liner for a shallow burial
Attachment 1 - Typical use of compressed cement sheeting liners for shallow burial

Compressed cement sheeting liners are the most commonly used method for shallow burial, see Attachment 7- Diagram 1 and Attachment 8- Diagram 2. The material required is described as 18mm compressed cement sheeting with two smooth faces and precision trimmed edges. Joining shall be with 8mm diameter cadmium plated, brass or galvanised bolts of suitable length. A total of eight bolts (two per cleat) are required.

The calculation of the dimensions of the two (2) sides, two (2) ends, one (1) lid and four (4) cleats shall be as follows:

- **Sides:**
  - the length of the coffin plus 300mm
  - the height of the coffin plus 75mm

- **Ends:**
  - the width of the coffin plus 100mm
  - the height of the coffin plus 75mm

- **Lid:**
  - the length of the coffin plus 300mm
  - the width of the coffin plus 172mm plus sufficient to allow for an overhang to assist in final placing
  - the lid may be in two sections

- **Cleats:**
  - the height of the coffin plus 75mm, and
  - 50mm wide

A cleat shall be attached at the end of each side section. Each cleat shall be set 18mm in from the outer edge. A masonry drill shall be used to form all bolt holes and the bolt holes shall not be less than 6mm from edge of the sheet.

Alternatively, angle brackets may be used top and bottom to secure the sides and ends together to prevent shifting or collapse of the liner during backfilling. The angle brackets must be secured with bolts in a similar manner as the cleats.

**Procedure of placement**

The side of the liner (with cleats attached) shall be installed and levelled. The ends shall be positioned so that they butt against the cleats and separate the sides and the structure shall be square.

The voids between the grave sides and grave liner shall be backfilled with compacted earth to the level of the liner wall prior to the placement of the coffin.

After the placement of the coffin, the voids within the liner shall be similarly filled prior to the fitting of the lid.
Encasing the Coffin in Concrete

This process would entail lowering the coffin in to the required depth and then pouring concrete around and over it. The covering layer should be no less than 50mm.

Encasing the Coffin in a mix of road-base and cement

This process would entail lowering the coffin to the required level and then compacting the mix around and over it. The mix is hosed with water causing it to harden. The covering layer of road base/cement mix should be no less than 75mm. It has been observed that a very durable and almost impenetrable protective layer is formed. This is a low cost method relative to other methods outlined.
APPLICATION FOR SHALLOW BURIAL
Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012

Name of applicant of applicant: .................................................................
Contact number: (H) ...................... (W) ........................... (M)....................
Relationship to deceased: ........................................................................
Name of deceased: ...................................................................................
Deceased’s date of death: ……/……/……
Reason for shallow burial: ........................................................................
Material of covering shallow burial: (tick one which is appropriate)
☐ Compressed Cement Sheeting
☐ Concrete
☐ Other, specify ........................................................................................
Plans and methodology are attached: ☐ Yes    ☐ No
Proposed date of interment: ……/……/……
Name and address of the cemetery where burial will take place: ................
Name of contact person of the cemetery: ..................................................
Contact number: .....................................................................................

Signature of applicant…………………………………… Date …../…../…..
Attachment 3 - Example briefing note to request approval of the shallow burial of a body

(LOGO)

Public Health Unit
Environmental Health Section

File Number: XXXXX

PURPOSE: To approve the shallow burial of a body

RECOMMENDATION: That approval be granted by the Director-General pursuant to Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012 to [NAME OF APPLICANT] to conduct a shallow burial of the body of [NAME OF DECEASED] subject to the condition that the burial shall comply with “Shallow Burial” policy and requirements of the approved plan and methodology.

KEY ISSUES: [TO BE COMPLETED BY PHU]

BACKGROUND [TO BE COMPLETED BY PHU]

CONSULTATION [TO BE COMPLETED BY PHU WHERE APPROPRIATE]

Signature: [SIGN]

Author: Authorised Officer
Telephone: Date: 

1 Public Health Unit Director

Approved vide delegation from the Director General (PH306 page 8.60) Public Health Delegations Manual under Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012. [SIGN]

2 Author
LETTER TO APPLICANT

Dear [applicant’s name]

Reference is made to your application of [DATE] in regard to the shallow burial of the body of [NAME OF DECEASED] in [NAME OF CEMETERY OR PLACE OF INTERMENT].

Approval has been granted by an authorised delegate of the Director-General pursuant to Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012 to reduce the depth of grave to not less than 400mm between the top of the lid of the grave liner and the natural ground level.

The approval is subject to compliance with the matters set out in the “Shallow Burial” NSW Health Policy Directive, requirements of the Public Health Regulation 2012 and to the conditions of the approved plans and methodology.

Should you have any inquiries please contact the [EHO] on [TELEPHONE] or email at (email address).

Yours sincerely,

[NAME]
Public Health Unit Director

[Date]
Attachment 5 - Example letter to Cemetery Authority

LETTER TO LOCAL CEMETERY AUTHORITY

(LETTERHEAD)

[Name]
[Address]

Dear [Name]

RE: SHALLOW BURIAL OF THE LATE [NAME OF DECEASED]
IN THE [NAME OF CEMETERY]

Approval has been granted to [Name of applicant] to conduct a shallow burial in accordance to Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012.

A copy of the approval letter and Policy Directive is attached for your information.

Please note this matter in your records and ensure that the interment complies with the relevant requirements.

Advice would be appreciated when the shallow burial has been completed by using the attached form.

Should you have any inquiries please contact [authorised officer) on [TELEPHONE] or email at (address).

Yours sincerely,

[NAME]
Public Health Unit Director

Enclosed (Attach form Appendix 6)

[Date]
LETTER FROM CEMETERY TO PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT

[CEMETERY LETTERHEAD]

[Director Name]
[Name of Public Health Unit]
[Address]

[Date]

Dear [Director Name]

RE: SHALLOW BURIAL OF THE LATE [NAME OF DECEASED]
IN THE [NAME OF CEMETERY]

In accordance with Clause 64 Public Health Regulation 2012 I wish to advise that the above interment was conducted in compliance with the matters set out in accordance with the NSW Health Policy Directive “Shallow Burial” and the requirements of the Regulation.

Method of covering Shallow Burial (tick one which is appropriate):

☐ Compressed Cement Sheeting
☐ Concrete
☐ Other, specify....................................................................................................
............................................................................................................................

Date of interment: ……/…../…….

Yours sincerely,

[Signature of manager]
[Name of manager]
Attachment 7 - Diagram 1 – Example – Grave liner for a shallow burial.
Attachment 8 - Diagram 2 – Example – Grave liner for a shallow burial