

Green Burial Council Standards for Burial Grounds

The Green Burial Council certifies four categories of cemeteries:

1. Hybrid Burial Grounds
2. Low-Impact Burial Grounds
3. Natural Burial Grounds
4. Conservation Burial Grounds

The order in which these categories are listed and discussed reflects increasing requirements to meet the particular standard. Each level of certification is in addition to the previous-level(s) requirements.

Hybrid Burial Grounds are conventional cemeteries offering the option for burial without the need for a vault (partial, inverted or otherwise), A vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner. Hybrid Burial Grounds shall not require the embalming of decedents and must allow for any kind of eco-friendly burial containers including shrouds.

Low-Impact Burial Grounds require the adoption of burial and operational practices that are non-toxic and energy-conserving. These facilities may lie within a dedicated section of a conventional cemetery, or make up an entirely separate cemetery. A Low-Impact Burial Ground achieves GBC certification by prohibiting the use of vaults (partial, inverted or otherwise), vault lids, concrete boxes, slabs or partitioned liners, and by prohibiting the burial of decedents embalmed with toxic chemicals, as well as banning burial containers not made from natural/plant derived materials. In addition, a Low-Impact Burial Ground must have in place a program of Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Natural Burial Grounds require adherence to all the Low-Impact Burial Ground practices/protocols and be designed, operated and maintained to produce a naturalistic appearance, based on use of plants and materials native to the region, and patterns of landscape derived from and compatible with regional ecosystems. Such landscapes may be part of ecological restoration, but for this level of certification complete restoration is not a requirement.

Conservation Burial Grounds, in addition to meeting all the requirements for a Natural Burial Ground, must further legitimate land conservation. A Conservation Burial Ground must protect in perpetuity an area of land specifically and exclusively designated for conservation. A conservation burial ground must involve an established conservation organization that holds a conservation easement or has in place a deed restriction guaranteeing long-term stewardship.

Standards applying to all levels:

1. Customer relations criteria.
 - a. Representations made through websites, in marketing materials, to members of the media, as well as the naming of any affiliated businesses owned by the cemetery operator, must not have the effect of misleading the public or “blur the lines” between the different levels of GBC certified burial grounds.
 - b. Clients and families must be given the opportunity to be involved with the burial and ritual process so long as participation does not conflict with state law or with these protocols in form or substance.
2. Funeral home criteria. A funeral home that operates on the premises of any GBC-certified Burial Ground must also be certified by the Green Burial Council.
3. Legal criteria (except for Hybrid Burial Grounds). Adherence to the certification requirements at any level must be guaranteed by deed restriction, conservation easement, or other legally binding and irrevocable agreement. Such agreement(s) must run with the land and be enforceable in perpetuity, equivalent to the force of requirements for perpetual maintenance of conventional cemeteries. In some instances, the GBC will allow for nonprofit operators of to utilize cemetery “rules and regulations” as a means of memorializing the GBC approved protocols/practices.

LEVEL ONE: Hybrid Burial Grounds

1. This facility shall not require the use of a vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner. .
2. Decedents cannot be required by cemetery policy to be embalmed.
3. Eco-friendly burial containers of any kind are to be accommodated, including the use of shrouds.

LEVEL TWO: Low-Impact Burial Grounds

1. The facility, or a designated portion of the facility, must be reserved for burial that does not require the use of a vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner.
2. Decedents are not to have been embalmed or embalmed only with GBC approved nontoxic chemicals.
3. Burial containers are to be limited to those made from materials that are nontoxic/nonhazardous and natural/plant derived, with shrouds allowed.
4. An Integrated Pest Management (IPM) must be implemented, so as to prohibit the use of pesticide other than instances where it is required to eradicate invasive species

LEVEL THREE: Natural Burial Grounds

1. This facility must meet all of the requirements for Level Two, and additionally meet the following:
2. Start-up criteria. A Natural Burial Ground must:

- a. Conduct an assessment (to be done by an independent professional in the field of biology/restoration ecology) that identifies any issues related to endangered species of plants/animals, cultural resources, and hydrology
 - b. Develop a plan for limiting visitation to sensitive areas;
 - c. Develop a plan for limiting the types, sizes, and visibility of memorial markers/features to preserve or restore naturalistic vistas in the cemetery landscape and (where appropriate) to landmarks outside its borders
3. Operations and management criteria. A Natural Burial Ground must:
- a. Develop a plan for dealing with unauthorized grave decoration and landscaping
 - b. Develop a "systems and operations" manual to be given to all staff members, contractors, and volunteers that communicates the above criteria and the goals and methods of meeting them; and
 - c. Establish an endowment fund to ensure the long term maintenance of the land and its trail system by setting aside at least 5% of all burial plot sales.

LEVEL FOUR: Conservation Burial Grounds

- 1. Meet the requirements for Level Two and additionally meet the following:
- 2. Land criteria. A Conservation Burial Ground must:
 - a. Be contiguous to, or in a position to augment the conservation goals of an ecologically significant park, wildlife corridor, critical habitat area, or permanently protected open space; or (with appropriate management practices) be large enough on its own to be considered a landscape-level conservation effort
 - b. Operate only in areas of the property where burial would not degrade the land and the surrounding landscape
 - c. Be owned by, or operated in conjunction with a government agency or a nonprofit conservation organization that is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a public charity and in business for at least five years (the "conservation partner"). The conservation partner must have legally binding responsibility for perpetual stewardship of the land, both in the operational facility and in the conservation area(s), and must set all conservation policies.
 - d. Utilize a deed restriction (if operator is a nonprofit conservation organization that has been established for at least five years) or a conservation easement that incorporates these standards. A conservation easement must also conform to all provisions of the Internal Revenue Code Section 170(h) and provide for public access to and through the site, particularly to connect it to adjoining protected open space, to the extent public use of the property is compatible with ecological goals.
- 3. Start-up criteria. A Conservation Burial Ground must:
 - a. Conduct a biological evaluation including baseline information on existing geology, hydrology, soils, and topography, and on both existing and

potential vegetation and wildlife. This evaluation must be used by the facility designers and operators to ensure that existing site resources are not degraded, and that the potential for re-introducing native species is given appropriate consideration in design and planning.

- b. Conduct an evaluation to determine potential erosion issues and measures necessary to prevent them;
 - c. Develop a plan for limiting visitation to sensitive areas as well as policies for families who choose "back country" or "off trail" burial; and
 - d. Compile a plant list for use as memorial features for every area or "zone" of the property where burial will take place, and a list of plants appropriate for use in restoration and/or preservation of native vegetation.
4. Operations and management criteria. A Conservation Burial Ground must:
- a. Develop a plan for using native plants and for protecting or rescuing locally rare plants
 - b. Establish an endowment fund to ensure the long term maintenance of the land and its trail system by setting aside at least 5% of all burial plot sales;
 - c. Utilize excavation and burial techniques/technology that minimizes impacts on surrounding land, and protect native plant diversity.