

Operating a Cemetery During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By the ICCFA Disaster Management Committee

The following is based on information available as of March 25, 2020.

When it comes to operating your cemetery during the current COVID-19 pandemic, the best advice is to remember the three S's:

1. Safety of your staff

2. Schedule tomorrow assuming a skeleton crew

3. Supply chain interruption

Safety of your staff: Keep your employees out of crowded emergency rooms and urgent care clinics where they may get sick. Now is the time to adhere to strict safety standards which include completing job hazard analysis forms (<https://www.osha.gov/Publications/osh3071.pdf>) that can be found on the OSHA website. This process enables managers to review each aspect of a job and identify all potential hazards.

- Reinforce the importance of washing hands following proper procedures. It's good practice to post pictographs near all sinks.
- Employees must remember to keep their hands away from their faces, especially their eyes and mouth.

- Stress the use of safety glasses which will have a dual purpose, protection from injury and illness.
- Gloves are important for protection but are useless if the employee touches his or her mouth with a contaminated glove. Show them how to properly use the gloves.
- Make sure your employees have the appropriate PPE for their specific job. Even seasoned employees may need a refresher course on how to use PPE.

The virus remains on sheet metal for 3 days, on cardboard for 1 day and copper for 4 hours. If you do not know how long the virus will last on a surface, assume 3 days as a precaution. The easiest way to practice social distancing is to be upfront and explain to others that for your safety and theirs, you will remain a minimum of 6' away from them. Six feet is about two arm's-lengths, which you can use as an estimate.

Schedule a skeleton crew: We have the toughest workforce. When snow, rain and cold stop construction workers, funeral workers keep going. However, this is a different situation because employees cannot work through this sickness like they may have with a head cold or the flu. Anyone displaying symptoms MUST

be sent home and quarantined for 14 days, otherwise, you risk your entire operation shutting down. You may have new employees to rely on, but those employees need to be adequately trained and supervised. Without the appropriate training, employees end up in the hospital with stitches and viruses. Now is the time to slow things down and schedule enough extra time to do the work. Families and funeral directors will understand. Consider a reduction in your daily burial schedule – this includes all type of interment. Limit 3 burials a day at specific times, 11am, 1pm and 3pm for example. This allows your team the time they need to clean equipment between services and properly complete all burial procedures. Also consider modifying your team schedules to minimize any overtime.

Supply chain interruptions: Fuel, parts, even internet and communications can deteriorate if your suppliers are short-staffed. Develop multiple backup plans and find alternate suppliers to avoid business interruption. 