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Australians opting for ‘alternative ap human body disposal

THE answer to the question “what happens to us when we die” is getting more unu remembered.

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Going inside one of Sydney's crematoriums

IT’S one of life’s biggest questions: ‘What happens to us when we die?’

But it seems Australians are increasingly choosing to answer it for themselves with many requesting in their wills to be made into snow globes, vinyl records and other unusual things.

View Legal director Matthew Burgess, who specialises in estate planning, said the [most common forms of body disposal in Australia included cremation](#), burial and donation to science.

But according to Mr Burgess there is a “significant and growing interest in alternative disposal approaches” including composting, where bodies are turned into soil so they can grow new life.

He said some of the latest trends included turning human ashes into snow globes and vinyl records.

“We average around five requests a year for snow globes,” Mr Burgess said.

“Vinyl records is one that is becoming increasingly popular among Baby Boomers.

“On average, we have seen multiple requests each year for the last few years.



Human ashes turned into a vinyl record. Picture: Aeon Video Source:Supplied

He said other clients had requested for their hair and ashes to be made into diamonds or shot into the sky as firecrackers.

“Particularly the US, this approach is very popular,” Mr Burgess said.

It’s also a growing trend in Australia with some businesses, including Ashes to Ashes, specialising in “sending cremated ashes skyward”.

“(Our business is) the scattering of ones cremated ashes by way of a beautiful and spectacular fireworks display”, the company’s website reads.

“Each event and its fireworks display especially created by a sensitive team of professionals to honour the deceased.”



Ashes to Ashes specialises in “the scattering of ones cremated ashes by way of a beautiful and spectacular fireworks display”. Picture: Ashes to Ashes. Source:Gold Coast Bulletin

Heart In Diamond is one of several companies that turns human ashes into diamonds “so you can hold on to your special memories of (loved ones) — forever”. Prices range from \$3135 for a budget orange-yellow diamond to more than \$30,000 for a one or two carat blue or white diamond.

The law firm has also had a “number of inquiries” about human ashes being made into glass orbs and hour glasses but none of Mr Burgess' clients have yet made their plans official.

There is also more interest in cost-effective “deluxe cardboard coffins” than ever before, according to Mr Burgess.

Others have asked about their ashes being delivered into space in a bid to orbit the Earth indefinitely.

“While we have had requests in relation to space flight

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...primarily, this has been because of the prohibitive cost structure of the approach.

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But it's not just having one's ashes moved off the planet that requires will-makers to pay top dollar.

"Mummification, burial at sea and cryonic freezing can run to tens of thousands of dollars," Mr Burgess said.

According to Mr Burgess, traditional and cultural methods of body disposal, including mummification and "at-sea burials", were still common.

"(Sea burial) requests come from those that have served in the Navy or otherwise have a strong affiliation with the sea," he said.

Melbourne man Roy Schiavello, who had died at 30 during a brain tumour operation, became Australia's first cryonic patient in 1990. His body is now frozen and stored at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Arizona.

Few Australians have since forked out for cryonics — the ultimate bid to extend human life — with costs upwards of \$40,000.

Mr Burgess said his law firm has "been involved in two (cryonics requests) over the last 20 years".

"At least part of the reason for this approach not being particularly popular relates to the expense and the fact that the arrangements have to be made with a provider based in United States," he said.

"With the new Australian-based provider, we expect to see increased interest in this area."



Frozen human bodies in storage containers known as dewars. Picture: Channel 7. Source: Channel 7

An Australian organisation is set to break ground on a \$500,000 NSW facility to offer people the chance to be [cryonically frozen after death in the hope that they could one day come back to life](#).

Southern Cryonics is searching for a construction firm to develop their warehouse-style project in Holbrook that is being funded by 10 Australian investors that have pitched in \$50,000 each.

Once completed, Australia will become just the third country in the world after the US and Russia where bodies can be frozen at an estimated \$90,000 per person.

"In relation to the cases we have been involved in, the threshold issue is that in order to be potentially effective, freezing process must be implemented before the person actually is medically deceased," Mr Burgess said.

"This one concept raises a myriad of practical issues from a medical perspective, and even more issues from a legal perspective."

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cannon”; Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards who claimed to have “snorted” his father’s ashes; and rap artist Tupac Shakur’s whose former Outlawz band members revealed they smoked his ashes after the funeral.

It seems the possibilities when it comes to human body disposal are limited only to one’s imagination. And of course, the law.

“The disposal of a body on death is a fundamental and critical part of every estate planning exercise,” Mr Burgess said.

“In many instances, the directions as to body disposal are set out in a sealed envelope marked ‘not to be open until death’ and left with the original will.”

Sometimes surviving family members are surprised to learn of their deceased loved ones wishes in the wake of their deaths.

“Particularly, in relation to some of the more unique approaches, often will-makers wish to avoid debates with family members about the appropriateness of their wishes,” Mr Burgess said.

“By setting up their directions in a confidential document not released until after death, will-makers can essentially ensure that they have the last word and create at least a moral — if not a legal — obligation to ensure that their wishes are complied with.”

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