



## **Burial at Sea**

Section 66 of the 1993 Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Wreck) Act enables the Minister for Transport to make regulations regarding the burial of human remains at sea.

While no such regulations have been made to-date, the Department of Transport has developed voluntary guidelines for those considering a burial at sea. These guidelines are based on previous experience and seek to prevent distressing situations such as where a body is returned to shore.

The guidelines recommend that cremation and the scattering of the ashes at sea be considered, rather than burial.

However, if cremation is not acceptable, then this Department offers the following recommendations with regard to the burial of human remains at sea:-

- (a) the deceased to be buried at a location which is greater than 50 miles from the nearest coast and in waters with a depth of 200 metres or more;
- (b) the body is to be weighted to ensure that it remains on the seabed. Iron and steel chain are considered suitable weighting materials - about 100kg is needed;
- (c) no plastic bags should be involved; the deceased can, however, be covered with a cotton sheet or paper covering as an alternative;
- (d) burial at sea of bodies which have been embalmed is **not** recommended;
- (e) the coffin should **not** be made of a species of timber such as oak which may be long-lived in the marine environment nor should it be made of a persistent synthetic material and should not include lead, copper or zinc;
- (f) the coffin should be constructed in such a way as to ensure that it will withstand any impact and remain intact when entering the sea;
- (g) the coffin should also be weighted, and the weight should be distributed in such a way that will resist any tendency for the coffin to assume a vertical position;
- (h) the corners of the coffin should be reinforced to withstand the impact when reaching the seabed;
- (i) a selection of holes should be drilled in the bottom, sides and lid of the coffin. This will assist in the quick sinking of the coffin to the seabed.

If you have further queries please contact [meofd@transport.gov.ie](mailto:meofd@transport.gov.ie)

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