



# Choices

Newsletter of the Funeral Consumers Alliance  
of San Antonio, Texas  
a 501(c)(3) organization



Since 1948, over 70 years of  
dedicated service.

**February 2025**

## Social Security Death Benefit to Increase Under New Bill

*Newsweek by Suzanne Blake,  
September 27, 2024*

Some Social Security benefits could increase by over \$2,000 if a new bill passes. Social Security benefits are typically paid monthly to seniors during retirement as well as to those living with disabilities. However, when a Social Security beneficiary dies, their family members can also get survivor benefits through a lump sum death payment.

For years, that amount has remained at \$255 and has stayed that way since 1954. This is despite inflation pushing costs up for Americans on everything from groceries, housing and healthcare. Funeral costs, too, have surged, which means for many, the lump sum payment is barely a dent in covering any death-related expenses, according to the lawmakers behind the Social Security Survivor Benefits Equity Act.

"This would be a major step in aligning the death benefit with current inflation-adjusted dollars," Kevin Thompson, a finance expert and the founder and CEO of 9i Capital Group, told *Newsweek*. "This will help offset the average cost of funerals and other arrangements in the event of death."

This week, Democratic Vermont Senator Peter Welch proposed the law, S.5178 - Social Security Survivor Benefits Equity Act, which would boost the death benefit to \$2,900 to better reflect today's inflation levels.

Independent Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts also signed on to co-lead the bill. "Funeral costs should be the last thing on the minds of grieving families when they lose a loved one," Welch said in a statement. "But because benefits designed to help folks afford funeral expenses haven't kept pace with inflation, the cost of burying a loved one has become top of mind for many mourning families."

The price of a full funeral and cremation service used to cost just \$700 when the original \$255 lump sum death payment was approved, but now the same service costs an average of \$6,280, according to the National Funeral Directors Association.

And if you're paying for a funeral with a casket, expect that fee to skyrocket to roughly \$8,300. Thompson said the bill is likely to pass since it's been 70 years, and no inflation adjustment has been made for the death payment since the 1950s."

People often snicker at the amount of money the Social Security death benefit, and it at least needs to be increased to be in line with inflation," Thompson said. "This will help families tremendously

during these trying times as families quite often have to raise money to bury their loved ones."

Still, not everyone is too certain about the bill's future. "The bill to raise the Social Security death benefit has garnered attention, but its chances of passing remain uncertain due to political and budgetary challenges," Joseph Patrick Roop, the president of Belmont Capital Advisors, told *Newsweek*. "Bills that aim to expand or adjust Social Security often face hurdles, especially given the broader debate on Social Security's solvency and potential reform."

If the new bill is passed, the higher \$2,900 amount would begin in 2025 based on the consumer price index for urban wage earners and clerical workers. Currently, survivors are eligible for the death payment if they meet certain qualifications.

You must apply within two years of your spouse or parent's death.

The benefit typically goes to a surviving spouse, but if there isn't one, that money can go to the children of the person who died.

Survivors also typically have the responsibility of alerting Social Security that their loved one died. This stops any future Social Security payments from wrongfully getting sent out.

Survivor benefits are also available to spouses aged 60 or older, spouses 50 or older with disabilities, or a spouse taking care of the deceased's child. For children, those survivor benefits are typically available to those under age 18, or 18 and older with a disability. Stepchildren and grandchildren can also qualify under special circumstances, along with parents of the deceased if they relied on the person for at least half of their financial support. But for those who merely receive the lump sum death payment, the amount can leave a lot to be desired, experts say.

"While that small payment may have assisted beneficiaries in past decades, the dramatic cost in living makes that amount seem shockingly low by today's standards," Alex Beene, a financial literacy instructor for the University of Tennessee at Martin, told *Newsweek*.

"The new payment would be over 10 times this amount, while still being a one-time distribution to help those affected by a loved one's passing. It's a logical step that, quite frankly, is one that should have been made long ago." (Ed. - As of 02/02/25 S.5178's Status remains as "Introduced" in congress)

## Message from the Chapter President, Georgia Snodgrass

It is my privilege to be the new President of the Board of Directors for Funeral Consumers Alliance of San Antonio Texas (FCASATX). And, what a board it is. We have a new Vice President, Autumn Puckett, and a new Secretary/Webmaster, Jessie Ong. Supporting us all in her own quiet way is our Treasurer, Linda Espino. This board is working hard to serve you as well as the community at large and grow the organization. Remember, this is YOUR organization. As your board officers, we couldn't do our jobs without the support of board members Janice Barsun, Keith Fox, Susan Hartley and Sean Habina. Let's not forget our "Treasured Volunteers", Suzanne Ong, Viola Muniz and Ed O'Connell. No less important and very much appreciated are those members who volunteer time to help us get the Choices Newsletter out twice a year. We thank you all! This organization wouldn't be the success it is today without this team working together. I encourage you to consider volunteering whether it's a couple of hours or a couple of days each month. Get in touch with our Volunteer Coordinator, Janice Barsun, by sending her an email at fcasatx9@gmail.com or calling her at (210) 341-2213 and leave a message. We'd love to include you as one of our "Treasured Volunteers".

It's been a year of change since our last Annual Meeting in March 2024. Thanks to our new Secretary/Webmaster, Jessie Ong, we have a new website ([www.funeralsatx.org](http://www.funeralsatx.org)) and a platform on Facebook. Check us out; we look good. We are getting involved with new organizations to increase our networking opportunities, which gives us more opportunities to tell the FCASATX story. We have a long history of serving our community since 1948, and we are all committed to continuing this legacy. Our board meetings are the fourth Saturday of each month at 10:00 a.m. and are open to our members. Just call us ahead of time at (210) 341-2213 to let us know you wish to attend so we can share the meeting location as we move around each month.

We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the Annual Meeting, Saturday, March 22, 2025, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., University Methodist Church, 5185 DeZavala Rd., San Antonio, TX 78249. There will NOT be an opportunity to join the meeting by Zoom this year. We have a couple of exciting speakers for you. Please come up and introduce yourself if we haven't met or say hi as one of our long-time members to reconnect with us.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you as well as this wonderful organization that is very near and dear to my heart. Now, let's get to work!

**Georgia Snodgrass, President**  
**FCA of San Antonio TX Inc.**



# **SATURDAY MARCH 22**

**1:00 P.M. TO 3:00 P.M.**

**WHERE: UNIVERSITY METHODIST CHURCH  
5084 DEZAVALA ROAD**

**SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS:**

**1:00 P.M. - 2:00 P.M.**

**Presentation: HOW END OF LIFE DOULAS FACILITATE  
PEACEFUL TRANSITIONS**

**Speakers: SANDY TRAVIS & WAYNE BEAMER**

**Presentation: VA BURIAL BENEFITS - HELPFUL OR NOT?**

**Speaker: JESSIE ONG**

**GENERAL MEETING  
2:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.**

**MEMBERSHIP WILL VOTE FOR:  
DIRECTOR GEORGIA SNODGRASS &  
DIRECTOR LINDA ESPINO  
TERMS: 04/01/2025 - 03/31/2028**

**NOTE: NO ZOOM MEETING PROTOCOL  
WILL BE PROVIDED FOR THIS MEETING.**

## Donations, Large & Small

The FCASATX's gratitude for the donations it receives is without limits. Here is an interesting donation story we thought you should hear. Suzanne, a treasured chapter volunteer, and myself were working a resource table at the American Legion Alamo Post 2 in Balcones Heights during a Veteran's Day ceremony. After a quick presentation of what the FCA does, one of the audience came to the resource table. His name was Juan Lecea, Jr. He didn't come up to the table to purchase a membership to the FCA for himself, no, he purchased an FCA membership for the next veteran, whoever that may be, that contacted FCA to become a member. Talk about a loving gesture! It so happened the membership was given to Elie Arroyo, a veteran with the 100% disability. Then Sophia, Elie's wife, also joined the FCA. Here is the cool part of the story, Juan Lecea himself is not a veteran. He just believes in supporting the veterans for all they do. Definitely, a donation from the heart.

**- Jessie Ong, Chapter Secretary & Webmaster**

**CEMETERY SURVEY**  
**San Antonio, Texas**  
**January 2025**



phone: 210-341-2213 / e-mail: fcasatx9@gmail.com

[www.funeralissatx.org](http://www.funeralissatx.org)

CEMETERY	in Ground: SINGLE PLOT / DOUBLE PLOT	OPENING & CLOSING 1,2 .. for Casket / or Cremains	in Buildings: MAUSOLEUM / COLUMBARIUM 3	PERPETUAL CARE of Grounds	GRAVE LINER / VAULT
<b>Chapel Hill Memorial Park</b> , 7735 Gibbs Sprawl Rd c: 210-599-2035 .. or .. cell: 210-649-6509 <a href="http://www.chapelhillisa.com">www.chapelhillisa.com</a> ; mdeabler@chapelhillisa.com	Single: \$1,200 - \$4,190 Double: \$1,400 - \$2,500 Cremains: \$800	\$1,600 + \$300 on Saturday	Single: \$2,895 & up Double: \$3,995 & up Glass front: \$3,500 & up	Included	\$995 installed / \$1,595
<b>First Memorial Park</b> 20667 Hwy. S.16 210-624-2840 <a href="http://firstmemorial.net">firstmemorial.net</a>	Single: 1,700 - \$3,500 Double: \$2,500 - \$4,500 Cremains: \$1,000 \$600 - \$950	Single: \$1,500 Double: \$1,800 Triple: \$2,000 \$850 - \$990	Single: \$3,500 & up Double: \$6,500 & up Niche: \$1,800 & up None	Included	\$1,000 & up / \$1,800
<b>Gates of Heaven Memorial Gardens</b> 16551 Weichold Rd., Converse, TX 210-359-6037	\$1,840 & up	Casket \$1,695 Cremains \$650	full / \$1,955 & up	Included	\$1,395 - \$10,000 / \$1,895 & up
<b>Meadowlawn Memorial Park</b> 5611 East Houston St. (Shauna) 210-661-3991	Double Only: \$12,995 - \$28,995 & up	\$2,695 after 2:30 p.m. add \$300	\$6,295 - \$12,995	+ 15%	\$715 - \$8,995 / \$865 - \$15,000
<b>Mission Park North Dominion</b> , 20900 IH-10 210-698-5252	FULL	FULL	FULL	FULL	FULL
<b>Mission Retama North East</b> , 1590 Lookout Rd.	Double only: \$5,229 - \$15,000	\$2,170 / \$1,670 after 2:30 p.m. add \$300	\$5,000 - \$22,000 (Double) / \$2,500 - \$4,500	Included	\$865 & up
<b>Mission Park South</b> , 1700 SE Military ofc: 210-924-4242 or cell: 210-967-4242 (Mike)	Single: \$7,657 Double: \$10,600	\$1,575	\$486	Cemetery Care	with package only
<b>Resurrection Cemetery @ Cordi-Marion</b> 11624 Culebra, #501 <a href="http://www.cordi@marion.org">www.cordi@marion.org</a>	must buy 2 spaces ↑ ↓ \$3,323 & up ← → \$4,533 & up	\$1,295 - \$1,495 / \$1,095	None	Included in Trust Fund	\$795 & up
<b>San Jose Burial Park</b> 8235 Mission Rd. 210-923-0272	Single: \$7995 & up Double: \$9,995 2 x \$12,995 includes liners	\$1,995 / \$1,295	\$4695 & up	Included	\$1,000 - \$3,000
<b>Sunset Memorial Park</b> 1700 Austin Hwy. 210-828-2811 <a href="http://Sunsetfuneralhomes.com">Sunsetfuneralhomes.com</a>	Single: \$3,500 Double: \$6,500	Single Cremains: \$1,500 Double Cremains: \$3,000	No Mausoleum / Columbarium: \$750	Included	Required / thru funeral home
<b>Wetmore Cemetery</b> (must be of Christian Faith) Corner of Higgins & Stahl Rd. 210-651-9755	Single: \$1,900 Double: \$3,800 & up	\$1,100 \$750	None	None	\$800 / \$1,995 & up
<b>Wildflower Memorial Park</b> 10392 Kriewald (Hillcrest Funeral Home)					



**CEMETERY SURVEY**  
**San Antonio, Texas**  
**JANUARY 2025**

phone: 210-341-2213 / e-mail: fcasatx9@gmail.com

[www.funeralssatx.org](http://www.funeralssatx.org)

CEMETERY	in Ground: SINGLE PLOT / DOUBLE PLOT	OPENING & CLOSING 1,2 .. for Casket / or Cremains	in Buildings: MAUSOLEUM / COLUMBARIUM 3	PERPETUAL CARE of Grounds	GRAVE LINER / VAULT
<b>Catholic Cemeteries &amp; Mausoleums (open to all Christians)</b>					
<b>San Fernando I</b>	FULL	FULL	FULL	FULL	FULL
<b>San Fernando II</b> 210-432-2303 746 Castroville Rd.	No Single Double: \$5,800 - \$7,500	\$1600/ \$925	\$1,750 - \$2,550/ \$7,000 & up	None	\$850 & up / \$2,200 & up
<b>San Fernando III</b> 210-432-2364 1735 Cupples Rd.	Single: \$4,700 & up Double: \$6,500 - \$7,200	\$1,800	\$2,800 & up	None	\$850 & up
<b>Holy Cross</b> 210-651-6011 17501 Nacogdoches Rd.	Single: \$1,850 - \$2,850 Double: \$3,425 - \$10,200	\$1,400 / \$775	\$2,650 - \$16,525 / \$3,300	Included	\$700 & up \$350
<b>Green Burial Cemetery</b>					
<b>Countryside Memorial Park, LLC</b> 331 Cemetery Lane, LaVernia, TX 512-203-9739 <a href="http://www.CountrysideMemorialPark.com">www.CountrysideMemorialPark.com</a> countrysidememorialpark@gmail.com	Single: \$1,599 - \$1,974 Double: \$2,899 - \$3,274 Cremains: \$499	\$695 & up Natural Burial	none ... but can bury for \$499	None	none
<b>National Military Cemetery</b>					
<b>VA Cemetery - Fort Sam Houston</b> 210-820-3891 1520 Harry Wurzbach Rd. <a href="http://www.va.gov/burial_benefits">www.va.gov/burial_benefits</a> VA National Cemetery Admin: 800-535-1117	No cost	No cost	No cost	No cost	No cost
Note: caskets or urns are not provided by FSH .. mortuary handles those items					

Footnotes: This survey provides some basic costs, but is not all inclusive of every cost you may be subject to ... check with the cemetery for additional costs.

1. Prices for weekday 9 a.m. - 2:30 or 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday and after 2:30 p.m. or 4 p.m. may be additional charges.
2. Most charges include graveside equipment (machinery and chairs, tent) though not all. Be sure to check with the cemetery.
3. Mausoleums and Columbariums (Niches) are subject to an opening and closing fee, prices vary.

General: All charges are approximate and are subject to change. For specific information about any item, check with the Cemetery or Mortuary.

This survey is for cemetery costs only and opening and closing the grave. Prices are subject to change.

It may be less expensive to purchase a grave liner through the Mortuary, but you may be subject to a setting fee of at least \$150.



# Army overhauls its troubled equine unit for Arlington's funeral caissons

From *The Washington Post*, by Kelsey Baker

Army Lt. Col. Jason Crawford waved down the spotless barn aisle, where a few friendly noses poked out from stalls. Behind him, a young woman in a pink helmet trotted a stocky black gelding in the ring. One room over, another horse plodded along, splashing in an aquatic treadmill. Six others exercised outside on soft rubbery footing. The farm usually caters to regional high-dollar competitive dressage or jumping horses. But for now, the Army has exclusively leased this equine rehabilitation facility as it attempts to overhaul its troubled caisson unit, the soldiers and horses that bring deceased troops to their graves in Arlington National Cemetery. The program was paused for what was supposed to be six weeks in April 2023 after the deaths of four Army horses highlighted neglectful living conditions in the Army stables.

But the temporary stoppage of horse transport at Arlington has given way to a total makeover of the caisson unit. Military officials have solicited help from public and private equestrian experts, including an Olympic gold medalist equestrian and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to help train the horses and soldiers as they look for a new facility and devise a new maintenance program. Among the plans: purchasing an \$8 million farm, though not the one here in Aldie, and a new rest and conditioning program for the horses housed there.

The overhaul has come with a cost, financial and otherwise. Some families have put funeral plans on hold until the unit returns to its ceremonial duties. In May, a military news outlet cited as many as 66 families waiting for burials

Critics doubt if the Army can keep the unit from falling apart again down the line. Highly trained horses are expensive to maintain. They, and the novice soldiers assigned to them, require years-long training programs that just a handful of people are capable of offering, experts say. But the unit isn't going anywhere; Congress barred the Army from disbanding it last year. "I would like to see the program stick around," said an Army veterinarian with knowledge of the platoon who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "But if I'm being realistic, I don't think it's sustainable."

Problems with the caisson unit first came into public view in 2022, when an Army investigation found the horses' living conditions in stables neglectful, contributing to four equine deaths. A report released this month put the horse death toll at 11 over an eight-year period. Earlier reports found horses bore scars from ill-fitted tack, too tight for their bodies. One was recorded collapsing under light pressure from a veterinarian's hands. The investigation determined that the overworked horses lived in cramped stalls and micro-paddocks, rife with contaminated feed and parasites. A necropsy of one horse found 44 pounds of gravel in its gut, a result of unsanitary living conditions. After a year of physical rehab efforts for the roughly five dozen horses the investigation centered on, all were quietly retired, too old and too broken to continue working.

Part of the problem is funding, officials said. Horses are expensive to feed, house and train properly. Horses are delicate animals — a small

bruise in a hoof can prompt lameness. Many are prone to ulcers and some to problems brought on by changes in weather. Some become seriously injured by getting stuck between stall walls when lying down. Add that the right horse to participate in ceremonies at Arlington is a special one. What's required: A horse whose back isn't too long nor legs so straight as to create health ailments down the line. One that arrives somewhat trained in three specialties — riding, wagon pulling and a special form of guided walk called neck-reining. It must be a black gelding, a neutered male. And finally, it must be able to tolerate the stimuli of a state funeral through the streets of Capitol Hill when necessary. There aren't many readily available, especially within the Army's budget, which starts around \$25,000 per horse, a modest sum for a pretrained horse that's forgiving enough to handle novice soldier riders' mistakes.

A team of caisson horses is an intricate system. Six pull the wagon, based on those used for cannons and ammunition in World War I. Each is trained to perform in its individual spot, with a unique position in the team's social hierarchy, and cannot be mixed on a whim. Plans for the new caisson program are grand enough to make any savvy equestrian salivate — tens of millions of dollars in funding, training from Olympians, custom-fitted saddles for each horse and specialized equine conditioning programs. The service has hired a team of acclaimed civilian consultants. "I think in three years, it's going to become a program the likes of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or the British, that other [similar] programs want to come and emulate," said Chester Weber, a world champion competitive carriage driver who has been hired to oversee equine training. Once a week, Martin Kohnen, retired riding master for the RCMP, flies in from Ottawa to train squads in "postilion" riding, an antiquated form of wagon pulling that the caisson platoon performs for each funeral. Three horses on the left are ridden while those on the right remain unmounted, meaning riders must get their own mounts and the horse next to them to walk in the same direction. "It takes years to become proficient," Kohnen said of the postilion work. "Here, they've got weeks."

Getting rid of riders and swapping to straightforward wagon pulling could halve the number of horses needed and eliminate complex postilion training requirements, according to the recent report outlining how the unit can improve long-term operations. But it's unclear whether Army officials are considering such a change.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that the Defense Department lacks any standardized policy about its equines — including donkeys and mules — which the Army veterinarian estimated to number between 250 and 350, to ensure that adequate care is provided. Last year, the Army released a memo directing the creation of an equine policy, but it's unclear how such a governing policy will be implemented, or how long it may take. Army officials declined to provide a date the unit would be ready to perform again, though the hiatus is expected to last at least through June 2025.

# Tech Companies Have Created A 'Digital Afterlife, And It's Creepy

From Medium.com, Rod Faulkner, June 26, 2024

Imagine a future where your phone pings with a message that your dead father's "digital immortal" bot is ready. This promise of chatting with a virtual version of your loved one – perhaps through a virtual reality (VR) headset – is like stepping into a sci-fi movie, both thrilling and a bit eerie.

As you interact with this digital dad, you find yourself on an emotional rollercoaster. You uncover secrets and stories you never knew, changing how you remember the real person.

This is not a distant, hypothetical scenario. The digital afterlife industry is rapidly evolving. Several companies promise to create virtual reconstructions of deceased individuals based on their digital footprints. From artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots and virtual avatars to holograms, this technology offers a strange blend of comfort and disruption. It may pull us into deeply personal experiences that blur the lines between past and present, memory and reality.

As the digital afterlife industry grows, it raises significant ethical and emotional challenges. These include concerns about consent, privacy and the psychological impact on the living.

What is the digital afterlife industry? VR and AI technologies are making virtual reconstructions of our loved ones possible. Companies in this niche industry use data from social media posts, emails, text messages and voice recordings to create digital personas that can interact with the living. Although still niche, the number of players in the digital afterlife industry is growing.

HereAfter allows users to record stories and messages during their lifetime, which can then be accessed by loved ones posthumously. MyWishes offers the ability to send pre-scheduled messages after death, maintaining a presence in the lives of the living. Hanson Robotics has created robotic busts that interact with people using the memories and personality traits of the deceased. Project December grants users access to so-called "deep AI" to engage in text-based conversations with those who have passed away.

Generative AI also plays a crucial role in the digital afterlife industry. These technologies enable the creation of highly realistic and interactive digital personas. But the high level of realism may blur the line between reality and simulation. This may enhance the user experience, but may also cause emotional and psychological distress.

Digital afterlife technologies may aid the grieving process by offering continuity and connection with the deceased. Hearing a loved one's voice or seeing their likeness may provide comfort and help process the loss. For some of us, these digital immortals could be therapeutic tools. They may help us to preserve positive memories and feel close to loved ones even after they have passed away. But for others, the emotional impact may be profoundly negative, exacerbating grief rather than alleviating it. AI recreations of loved ones have the potential to cause psychological harm if the bereaved ends up having unwanted interactions with them. It's essentially being subjected to a "digital haunting".

Other major issues and ethical concerns surrounding this tech include consent, autonomy and privacy.

For example, the deceased may not have agreed to their data being used for a "digital afterlife". There's also the risk of misuse and data manipulation. Companies could exploit digital immortals for commercial gain, using them to advertise products or services. Digital personas could be altered to convey messages or behaviors the deceased would never have endorsed.

We need regulation. To address concerns around this quickly emerging industry, we need to update our legal frameworks. We need to address issues such as digital estate planning, who inherits the digital personas of the deceased, and digital memory ownership.

The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) recognizes post-mortem privacy rights, but faces challenges in enforcement. Social media platforms control deceased users' data access, often against heirs' wishes, with clauses like "no right of survivorship" complicating matters. Limited platform practices hinder the GDPR's effectiveness. Comprehensive protection demands reevaluating contractual rules, aligning with human rights.

The digital afterlife industry offers comfort and memory preservation, but raises ethical and emotional concerns. Implementing thoughtful regulations and ethical guidelines can honor both the living and the dead, to ensure digital immortality enhances our humanity.

What can we do? Researchers have recommended several ethical guidelines and regulations. Some recommendations include:

- obtaining informed and documented consent before creating digital personas from people before they die
- age restrictions to protect vulnerable groups
- clear disclaimers to ensure transparency
- and strong data privacy and security measures.

Drawing from ethical frameworks in archaeology, a 2018 study has suggested treating digital remains as integral to personhood, proposing regulations to ensure dignity, especially in re-creation services.

Dialogue between policymakers, industry and academics is crucial for developing ethical and regulatory solutions. Providers should also offer ways for users to respectfully terminate their interactions with digital personas.

Through careful, responsible development, we can create a future where digital afterlife technologies meaningfully and respectfully honor our loved ones. As we navigate this brave new world, it is crucial to balance the benefits of staying connected with our loved ones against the potential risks and ethical dilemmas. By doing so, we can make sure the digital afterlife industry develops in a way that respects the memory of the deceased and supports the emotional wellbeing of the living.



## Interested in Burial at Sea?

Burial at Sea is a means of final disposition of remains that is performed on United States Navy vessels. The committal ceremony is performed while the ship is deployed. Therefore, **family members are not allowed to be present**. The commanding officer of the ship assigned to perform the ceremony will notify the family of the date, time, and longitude and latitude once the committal service has been completed. The average amount of time, for burial at sea, is **12 to 18 months**, once the remains/cremains are received at the port of embarkation.

**Eligibility:** Individuals eligible for this program are: (1) active duty members of the uniformed services; (2) retirees and veterans who were honorably discharged. (3) U.S. civilian marine personnel of the Military Sealift Command; and (4) dependent family members of active duty personnel, retirees, and veterans of the uniformed services.

**How to get started:** After the death of the individual for whom the request for Burial at Sea is being made, the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD) should contact MyNavy Career Center 1-833-330-6622 to request a packet and for additional information.

Supporting documents which must accompany this request are:

(1) a photocopy of the death certificate (2) the burial transit permit or the cremation certificate (3) a copy of the DD Form 214, discharge certificate, or retirement order.

The Burial at Sea Request Form and the three supporting documents listed above make up the Burial at Sea Request package. (You will need to use the search menu type: OPNAV 5360 and download both forms).

**Burial Flag:** A Burial Flag is required for all committal services performed aboard United States Naval vessels, except family members, who are not authorized a burial flag. Following the services at sea, the flag that accompanied the cremains/remains will be returned to the PADD. If the PADD does not wish to send a burial flag for the service, a flag will be provided by the Navy for the committal service, but will not be sent to the PADD.

**Cremated Remains (Cremains):** Cremains must be in an urn or temporary container (preferably Bio-degradable) to prevent spillage in shipping. Recent changes in law prohibit the discharge of plastics at sea. Families are encouraged to have the cremains inurned directly, or transferred to a sturdy biodegradable urn at their local funeral home to facilitate burial at sea. Burial at Sea Coordinators at the ports of embarkation are available to field any questions regarding the urns. The cremains, along with the completed Burial at Sea Request package should be forwarded to the Burial at Sea Coordinator at the desired port of embarkation (listed below). Prior to shipment, it is recommended that a phone call be made informing the coordinator of the pending request. ONLY Priority Mail Express Service is authorized when shipping cremains and it is recommended that that Tracking and Signature On Delivery is used to ensure the package is delivered to the correct individual in a timely manner.

**Intact Remains (Casketed):** Specific guidelines are required for the preparation of casketed remains. All expenses incurred in this process are the responsibility of the PADD, who will select a funeral home in the area of the port of embarkation. After this selection has been made and notification has been provided to the coordinator, the casketed remains, the request form, supporting documents, and the burial flag are to be forwarded to the receiving funeral home. The coordinator will make the inspection and complete the checklist for the preparation of casketed remains. It is recommended that funeral homes responsible for preparing and shipping intact remains contact the Mortuary Services office at Navy Casualty in Millington, TN to receive the preparation requirements.

**Contact MyNavy Career Center at 1-833-330-6622 to receive the Burial at Sea packet.**

## Can Dogs Sense When Someone Is About to Die?



Dogs have always been humans' best friends. They're loyal and loving, and their keen senses of smell make them great partners for all sorts of jobs, from detecting drugs or explosives to alerting people about medical issues. It's no surprise that dogs are also used in

hospice care to comfort the dying. It seems like dogs have an almost "sixth sense" knowledge for when someone is about to die.

If you're a dog fan, you've probably heard tales of canines sitting by someone's side during their last moments, keeping them company as they pass on. Their quiet show of solidarity is one of those things that dogs do that endears them to our hearts even more. There are several beliefs about how dogs know when someone is about to die.

We're all aware of how powerful a dog's nose is. Depending on the breed, their noses can range from impressive to exceptional, but there's one thing that they all have in common: they can smell much more than we can. Compared to humans, who have a measly 6 million olfactory senses in our noses, dogs can have a whopping 300 million, along with a larger area of the brain dedicated to understanding different smells.<sup>1</sup> A person who is dying smells different from someone who is healthy, and dogs can likely pick up on this difference, even if they don't know for sure what it means.

More than verbal communication, dogs rely on body language to talk to each other and understand their favorite humans. Even without their impressive noses, their ability to understand body language gives them a heads up whenever something is wrong. When someone is dying a dog will react instinctively to even unconscious changes in body language, whether it's hunched shoulders or trembling hands.

Many people believe that the reason is as simple as a "sixth sense." It's almost as though your dog knows when your soul is ready to move on. There's no real way of knowing what a dog is thinking when they stay with somebody on their deathbed, so this sixth sense theory can seem more than a little far fetched. This belief, however, does have historical precedent. The Egyptians, Persians, and Greeks are examples of ancient cultures that used dogs as guardians of the dead. In Persia, a dog was often kept close to a dying person to help protect their newly released soul from evil spirits.

With all the other tricks that our dogs perform, it's no surprise that sensing death is another skill that they have. We'll let you decide whether you believe that dogs can sense death because of their sixth sense, uncanny body language reading skills, or powerful noses. Or all of the above. One thing that we can all agree on, though, is how awesome our dogs .

From [www.dogster.com](http://www.dogster.com), by Nicole Cosgrove, Nov. 29, 2024





Funeral Consumers Alliance  
Of San Antonio  
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