

Joint Initial Guidance on Coffin Accreditation Schemes

Members of the FBCA, ICCM, APCC and the CSGB may be aware that currently two coffin accreditation schemes exist, managed independently by The Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers Association (FFMA) and The Coffin, Casket and Shroud Association (CCSA). The schemes will hopefully help ensure that coffins brought for cremations are fit for purpose and cause no problems to cremation authorities, funeral directors or bereaved people.

Accredited coffins will have undergone a range of tests carried out by recognised test houses, with those that pass the tests receiving accreditation by one or the other scheme. The tests include those for strength, roller/ball bearing functionality, auto charging, ignition, radiant heat, ash volume and residue. Coffin lining materials will also be tested.

Funeral directors, via their professional organisations, will be encouraged to purchase accredited coffins in order to provide a safe and secure product for their clients that is fit for purpose and trouble free. Discussions are currently in hand to have more frequent and formal contact with the funeral associations which will give us the opportunity to promote this requirement and update them on the overall situation and serious individual incidents in relation to coffins if and when.

Our understanding is that each scheme will maintain a website containing a list of accredited coffins and, therefore, cremation authorities can check the test status of coffins prior to their receipt. It is also understood that accredited coffins will be stamped. Cremation authorities that accept the schemes are advised to add a question for funeral directors on the preliminary application for cremation, requesting the coffin name, manufacturer and accreditation number. Accreditation can then be confirmed or not via the appropriate website.

Should any crematorium experience a problem with an accredited coffin, you are strongly advised to report to:

- The funeral director concerned
- Your safety officer
- Your membership organisation so advice and assistance can be given as and when required. A form is available from your association, which is common to all the cremation associations for you to record the details of any incidents and/or difficulties you experience in the future with accredited coffins. The Associations will share the information received and produce national statistics relating to coffin safety in order to identify similar incidents and any emerging trends so appropriate joint action can be taken
- Should the problem encountered have caused injury or had the potential to have caused injury, the Health and Safety Executive should be notified in accordance with RIDDOR - Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013. Further information on RIDDOR can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/>
- Cremation authorities should also consult with their own legal department/advisor

It is important that you gather documented evidence of any incident, which must include witness statements and photographic evidence wherever possible.



Legal Opinion

The FBCA, ICCM, APCC and CSGB have sought legal opinion on the adoption of the scheme and the lawfulness of refusing to cremate any coffin that has been found to cause safety issues, emission problems, damage to cremators or abatement equipment, which is appended to this guidance.

As the two schemes have no great material differences, cremation authorities could not accept one scheme over the other. However, in order to help you deal with any issues arising in the future we have obtained permission from our lawyer to send you a copy of the legal opinion on the strict understanding that is only for use by our respective members, their authorities and companies. It must therefore not be copied, forwarded or circulated without the express and joint consent of the ICCM, FBCA, APCC and CSGB.

Further information/clarification can be obtained from the respective scheme operators and their websites - www.ffma.co.uk and www.ccsa.co.uk

Unaccredited Coffins

Occasionally, a request might be received to cremate a deceased person in an unaccredited coffin. This might be due to a family either making or buying their own coffin and arranging a funeral without using a funeral director. In these circumstances, a member of the cremation authority staff should give guidance on the structure and material not to be used in the construction of the coffin, and to view the coffin in advance of it being brought to the crematorium if practicable to do so. Information exists within the current Process Guidance notes issued by Defra and the FBCA's guidance document 'Instruction to Funeral Directors'. If the coffin or casket is deemed to be unfit for purpose it will be necessary for the cremation authority to make a decision regarding acceptance or refusal of the coffin or casket.

There will be a lead in time during which funeral directors will be using up old stock; however, few problems have been encountered with the standard range of traditional coffins usually held by funeral directors.

