

**LIFESTYLE / RETIREMENT****Scattering ashes subject to laws, park guidelines, more**

Do some research before heading out to scatter ashes from an urn.

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**By Treva Lind**

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SPOKANE, Wash. — Maybe the spot is a favorite fishing hole. Or you've selected a mountain with sweeping views to scatter a loved one's cremated remains.

Before heading out with the urn, though, do some research. Depending on where you go for spreading ashes — on public, private, federal or state lands — some rules might apply.

Rule No. 1: If you don't own the land, ask permission first. Generally, if guidelines are followed, it's fine in many places.

Steve Christensen, Mount Spokane State Park manager and ranger, gets the request for scattering of ashes at least two or three times a year. "People are allowed to spread ashes as long as they get permission from the land owners or permission from the park manager," he said. People usually notify him, although he acknowledged a few relatives likely make a silent tribute.

But people shouldn't expect official approval for a favorite location on U.S. Forest Service land. "In the most respectful way we can, we ask that people not scatter ashes or erect monuments," said Franklin Pemberton, a spokesman for the Colville National Forest in Washington. "It's our Forest Service manual direction."

In an email, a national U.S. Forest Service spokesman said the manual "directs agency actions related to cemeteries."

“Though the manual isn’t specific to ‘scattering ashes,’ the agency recognizes the deliberate ceremonial placement of human remains as establishing a final resting place or burial ground and, therefore, could restrict access or actions on the land.”

For Mount Rainier National Park, a permit is required to scatter human ashes. Certain policies also must be followed regarding group size, location, times and actual disbursement.

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Washington, the state Department of Licensing’s website offers guidelines, under “Frequently Asked Questions: Funerals and Cemeteries.” Some of the places where you may scatter cremated remains are on private land, with the permission of the land owner; national parks, after receiving permission from the chief park ranger; and state trust uplands, with permission of the regional manager for each scattering. However, scattering by commercial scattering services isn’t permitted.

Idaho has fairly open guidelines for spreading ashes, other than to seek permission if the land isn’t your property, said Eli Yates, owner of Yates Funeral Homes in Coeur d’Alene and Hayden Lake. However, one frequently heard request never pans out.

“The most common question we get is for golf courses, and the answer would be ‘no,’” Yates said. “Most of the golf courses are private, but even public ones don’t allow it.”

“When people do scatter ashes in our area, it’s their favorite hunting, fishing or camping spot, or one of our surrounding lakes where the family has enjoyed time,” he added. “We ask that when people do scatter, that it’s actually scattered and not left in a recognizable fashion on an open trail, out of respect to everyone else.”

[In New York, the Department of State, Division of Cemeteries, has a Q&A website, [dos.ny.gov/CMTY/faq-cremation.html](https://dos.ny.gov/CMTY/faq-cremation.html), with information about regulations involving cremations and what can be done with the

In Washington, when people ask the Neptune Society Spokane office about scattering ashes, manager Chuck Wetmore said he talks to families about state guidelines along with other considerations.

“We advise people to consider when they’re scattering cremated remains what the impact might be,” Wetmore said. “We have had people who have scattered in the backyard, and later, when they go to sell the property, they have to make a disclosure.”

He’s also seen problems when people stay in the home. “I know of a family who scattered cremated remains in the garden. When the person decided to remarry, the new spouse was uncomfortable with the fact this person’s remains were scattered in the garden, which this person could see from the kitchen window. The spouse ended up selling the house because of the new spouse’s concerns.”

Wetmore warns that people can’t scatter cremated remains over an existing grave in a cemetery. “We like to encourage people to select a grave for the ashes or a niche in the cemetery’s columbarium, as another option to scattering,” he said. “Neptune Society offers a free scattering at sea for the families we serve.”

Veterans can have free options at national cemeteries across the United States.

Kathy Long, executive director of the People’s Memorial Association, a Washington state nonprofit for funeral education and advocacy, offered some practical tips for when families are at a site to scatter ashes.

“You want to make sure you’re standing upwind,” she said. “You don’t want to have ‘The Big Lebowski’ moment,” referring to a scene in the 1998 movie where cremated remains ended up on the two characters who were scattering a friend’s ashes.

Also, if the site is under a special tree or in another concentrated yard area, people need to consider adding soil enhancers, Long said. “You need to mix with some kind of composting material, because cremated remains are basically crushed bones, so they are very alkaline and have a high sodium content,” she said. “There’s not available nutrients for plants.”

In Washington, about 75 percent of people who die are cremated, based on state Department of Health data. When a cemetery plot or niche isn’t used for a final resting place, families often take the ashes home with them.

“We don’t know how many choose to scatter the ashes and how many have the ashes sitting in an urn on a mantel; they’re just choosing cremation,” Long said. “A lot of people choose cremation because they believe it’s more ecologically friendly to the earth, rather than take up space in the ground. For some people, they

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