

Sorry you're dead. Here's one more tax. \$50 for cremation.

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By **Michael Rollins, The Oregonian**

Government now takes two unavoidable outcomes -- death and taxes -- and combines them. [The Seattle Times has this tax tale from the crypt.](#)



Cremations in King County will become \$50 more

expensive next month because of an item in the county budget that caught some in the funeral and cremation business off-guard.

The County Council approved the fee -- the first of its kind in the state -- Nov. 20 along with its 2008 budget. It also required that all county death cases be reviewed by the medical examiner before the bodies are cremated.

The \$50 will raise about \$352,000 a year for the county Medical Examiner's Office; the money will be used to pay for two and a half new employees to deal with the paperwork and additional investigations related to the new requirement, said Gareth Johnson, manager of Public Health -- Seattle & King County.

But some in the funeral industry are concerned about the fee -- saying they weren't notified and it makes the already expensive funeral process even costlier.

John Eric Rolfstad, executive director of the People's Memorial Association, a funeral consumer organization, said his group didn't find out about the fee until after it was approved by the council.

Rolfstad said the fee often places a burden on people who have chosen cremation because they can't afford a burial. In general, the least expensive

cremation costs about \$650. while the least-



expensive burial costs about \$5,000.

The new cremation fee also is unfair to people whose religion requires cremation, he said.

"Basically, what we're saying is ... if a Christian wants a burial they're not going to pay the tax, but if you're a Sikh or a Hindu or a religion that requires cremation, you're going to have to pay the tax," Rolfstad said. "It feels like something was put in place quickly and wasn't really thought through."

There are about 8,000 cremations in the county each year, compared with about 3,600 burials, Rolfstad said.

Public Health -- Seattle & King County, which oversees the Medical Examiner's Office, asked for the fee to address a "compelling regulatory concern," Johnson said. The concern is that some

deaths in which there might have been foul play



aren't being investigated because the medical examiner is not notified of the death, he said.

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