



## GBSC GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Biodegradable means capable of decaying through the action of living organisms.

*For green burial:* A biodegradable container can be a shroud, casket, or other form of enclosure made from plant or animal sources (wool, cotton, linen, silk, hemp, bamboo, seagrass, willow, etc.)

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Biofuel means a fuel made from a living source.

*For green burial:* If or where motorized equipment is used in the performance of a green burial, the equipment will ideally be electric, hybrid, or use advanced biofuel (where available).

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Care Fund means a fund, generally required by law, established, held, and invested by a cemetery to fund current and future care and maintenance expenses.

*For green burial:* In a green or natural burial ground this fund will cover stewardship of the land and the costs required to maintain the land in a natural state.

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Cemetery means a place where human remains or cremated remains are buried, scattered, or entombed.

*For green burial:* A Green Burial Conservation Cemetery will be an entire cemetery dedicated to green or natural burial, incorporating environmental practices throughout its operations, including landscape design and maintenance, use of biofuels for vehicles, green building principle in all structures, site-wide programs to reduce, re-use and recycle, including composting. (Increasingly, traditional cemeteries are incorporating green burial areas – see Green Burial Cemetery below.)

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Communal Memorial means a memorial (or monument) designed for multiple names, dates and/or epitaphs to be added or inscribed over time.

*For green burial:* In a green cemetery or burial area, a communal memorial will be the preferred form of memorialization. It will be made from natural, locally sourced materials and be unobtrusive in size to preserve the overall natural appearance of the site. Ultimately, it is the green burial area as whole that becomes a living memorial to the persons interred there.

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Community Outreach means the process of educating and informing the wider community to form mutually beneficial relationships that work toward a common goal.

*For green burial:* As a key function of a green cemetery or burial ground, this means actively working with and educating the public and all levels of government to promote and advocate for environmentally sustainable burial and funeral services. Such advocacy will encourage the creation of practices, policy and legislation that empowers and creates options, including meaningful, participatory rituals and ceremonies.

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Conservation Easement means a legal agreement, normally registered on the title of a parcel of land, between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits its use to protect its natural, intrinsic values.



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*For green burial:* For a green cemetery, or green burial area within an existing cemetery, a conservation easement will be registered against the land used for green burial purposes to preserve its natural state and prevent it from being repurposed for another form of cemetery or non-cemetery use.

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Container means a shroud, casket, coffin, urn, or alternate form of containment used to enclose human remains or cremated remains for burial.

*For green burial:* Burial containers are made of natural, biodegradable materials and where the materials are ideally locally sourced and the containers locally manufactured.

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Decomposition means the process of decay, the breakdown of organic components by natural processes.

*For green burial:* In green burial, the goal is to minimize interference with the natural components of the soil, such as water, oxygen, fungi, and microbes, to facilitate the decomposition process. For this reason, human remains are not embalmed, are placed in a biodegradable container or shroud with biodegradable clothing only and are buried at a shallower depth than in a conventional burial.

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Double-Depth Interment means a single grave is used for the burial of the human remains of two persons, normally in two caskets, one over the other. This form of burial is common across Canada.

*For green burial:* Ideally, a single green burial is made at a shallower depth (1.2m) to create optimal conditions for decomposition. Shallower, single depth graves also require less resources to dig; however, as double-depth interment can double the number of burials possible where available land is scarce and/or costly and demand is high, double depth green burial may an option.

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Embalming means an artificial process of preparing human remains for final disposition. Embalming is achieved through arterial injection of embalming chemicals and the removal of natural bodily fluids. Embalming chemicals (even so-called “green” chemicals) commonly contain highly toxic components including, but not limited to, formalin (formaldehyde), alcohol compounds, surfactants, disinfectants, solvents and artificial colour. The manufacture and transportation of embalming fluids also carries a considerable carbon footprint, for a single use product, for both the chemicals and containers used. Also, the long-term health impacts on the embalmers who use these products is still being studied.

*For green burial:* Embalming is not a natural or necessary process. It inflicts needless damage to the body, and it is not, in most cases, required by law. Embalming is contrary to the fundamental ideals of green burial. A green alternative to embalming is the topical (surface) bathing and disinfection of human remains (using natural, environmentally safe soaps and essential oils) and using refrigeration, dry ice, or Techni-ice™ to keep the body cool and in reasonable condition for a viewing, wake, or vigil.

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Grave Reuse (also called grave leasing) means the act of reusing graves for future burials on a continual basis, after previously interred remains have fully decomposed. The purpose of this practice, common



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throughout the world, is to conserve land and promote long-term sustainability of a cemetery.

*For green burial:* While not yet an accepted practice in North America, grave re-use is a way to make cemeteries more environmentally sustainable and counteract what many consider to be a waste of land resources, namely, the modern, conventional, perpetual interment right cemetery.

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Green Burial Cemetery means a pre-existing cemetery that has set aside and created an area of the cemetery dedicated exclusively to green burial.

*For green burial:* While the creation of a stand-alone Green Burial Conservation Cemetery is the ideal, this type of site can be difficult to establish. The creation of green burial areas in existing cemeteries is usually the quickest, simplest, and most effective way to make green burials available to communities.

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Green Burial means an environmentally oriented practice where the un-embalmed body is buried directly in the earth, allowing it to decompose naturally and to contribute to new life.

*For green burial:* As well as being a simple form of disposition it is also, as a final act of life, a reflection and statement of personal values for those who seek to minimize their impact on the environment.

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Greening Initiative means the processing of offsetting Greenhouse gases emitted by human activity.

*For green burial:* For a green cemetery this would include using xeriscape principles in the design of the grounds, removing hardscape (paved roads, sidewalks, grave caps, etc.) wherever possible, protecting and planting trees and indigenous plant, reducing the use and consumption of water, energy, and other resources, and using alternative sources of fuel and energy for buildings and equipment, etc.

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Greenwashing means promoting a business or service as being more environmentally oriented than it really is through deceptive marketing.

*For green burial:* This can mean misleading customers about the environmental benefits of a product or service through misrepresentation of the facts, misleading advertising or making unsubstantiated claims about their cemetery or services.

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Lower and Fill means the process of lowering a shrouded body, or a body within a casket or alternative container into a grave, and then infilling the grave.

*For green burial:* Where safety considerations and practical circumstances permit, a body may be lowered without using a mechanical lowering device, and the family and others at a green burial service then can assist in the partial or complete filling of the grave (see 'Opening and Closing').

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Memorial Monument or Marker means, in a conventional cemetery, an upright headstone or monument ("tombstone"), a tablet or plaque installed flush with the ground, or other form of inscription installed in a cemetery, usually directly on individual graves, to memorialize the deceased over the long term.



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*For green burial:* Individual memorialization is discouraged in green burial cemeteries, and where it may be allowed, the memorial is normally small, made from a natural, local materials, and may be handmade and designed to gradually decompose at the site.

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Native plant means a species of plant that, according to current knowledge, arose and/or became endemic within a given area prior to European contact. Native plants include those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations, in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the natural landscape.

*For green burial:* A green burial cemetery will, in its natural burial areas and throughout the entire cemetery, source and use native plant species wherever possible and appropriate. The green cemetery should also be able to provide plant lists/other information to families interested in green burial, of native species that may be planted on occupied green burial graves.

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Native Species Habitat Restoration means the process of restoring a native plant ecosystem where, through human interference, the site has been significantly altered from its natural state, with the intent of encouraging other native plants and animals to return and re-establish in the area.

*For green burial:* The creation and development of green burial sites by natural extension is a form of native species and habitat restoration. Through careful planning, design and maintenance of a green burial area, restoration occurs as a benefit of introducing this form of final disposition.

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Natural means the state in which a naturally occurring object, landscape or organism exists without human intervention or influence.

*For green burial:* A dead human body in its natural state is one that is not embalmed. Natural fibre can be a material made from a naturally occurring substance, usually minimally processed, without nonorganic chemicals. A natural memorial can be a stone discovered in a gravesite during the excavation of the grave.

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Opening and closing means the process of excavation of a grave, and after the remains are placed, the filling in a grave with soil to completely bury the remains and “closing” the grave.

*For green burial:* A green burial cemetery or service provider may, as circumstances, procedures, and safety considerations permit, offer a family the option to participate in the opening, and most commonly, the closing of a green burial grave.

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Outer Burial Container means a wooden (“rough”) box, concrete grave liner, or other form of vault (typically made of metal or fiberglass) to enclose a casket or urn in a grave. This form of container is used primarily to reduce maintenance in conventional cemeteries by keeping the ground level.

*For green burial:* A fundamental of green burial is that the buried human remains have direct contact.



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with the earth to permit natural and rapid decomposition. Outer burial containers, of any type, are not permitted for green burials.

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Planting of Graves means the landscaping of individual graves, often limited to a specific space, plant type and design format in a traditional cemetery.

*For green burial:* Individual, non-native plantings are discouraged or disallowed. Green burial cemeteries allow graves to be restored with only native species of plants and seeds.

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Recycling means the process of diverting waste from a landfill to repurpose or reuse the waste material.

*For green burial:* This includes the recycling of landscape debris through composting as well as collecting and recycling all general waste (plastics, paper, metals, and glass) generated at the cemetery.

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Shroud means a large sheet of cloth or specially made garment in which human remains are wrapped or enclosed for final disposition.

*For green burial:* A shroud will be made of a natural fibre (cotton, linen, hemp, bamboo, wool, or silk), either plain or decorated with natural, vegetable-based paints or dyes, and may include ornamentation (herbal sachets, aromatic plants, seagrass, shells, bone, etc.). In a green burial, a body wrapped in a shroud can be buried directly in the earth or, if preferred, placed in a fully biodegradable casket for burial.

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Stewardship means the concept of maintaining a natural landscape with care and concern for its use and function.

*For green burial:* The concept of stewardship allows for the management of potentially harmful species in a green area. This might include the manual or mechanical removal of non-native, invasive plants, managing pests such as ticks, and working to sustain general plant and ecosystem health.

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Xeriscape means a form of environmental design using various methods to effectively use natural precipitation and reduce the need for supplemental water in the landscape.

*For green burial:* A key component of a green burial cemetery operation is to limit the use of water in the green burial area. Normally this would mean that in-ground irrigation systems are not used unless needed for plant establishment, survival, and general health. Natural precipitation is the primary source of water in a green burial area.