

## Burial Vaults FAQs

Legislation passed by the 2010 General Assembly offers veterans and their families the option to purchase outer burial containers at cost from the Virginia Department of Veterans Services for use at Virginia's two state-operated veterans cemeteries. The Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery is located in Suffolk and the Virginia Veterans Cemetery is located in Amelia. The Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery is under construction in Southwest Virginia near Dublin. The cemeteries are operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS).

House Bill 479, sponsored by Delegate Bill Carrico, will bring services provided by the two existing state-operated veterans cemeteries closer in-line with the services offered by national cemeteries, which provide outer burial containers at no cost. HB 479 was passed unanimously by the General Assembly and was approved by Governor Bob McDonnell on April 11, 2010.

### **What is an outer burial container?**

Outer burial containers are concrete vaults or liners with domed lids and metal reinforcement. The concrete liners sold at the Virginia state-operated cemeteries will be equivalent to a standard concrete vault in strength and durability. The primary purpose of the outer burial container is to protect the casket and stabilize the ground area.

### **Why are outer burial containers being offered to veterans at cost?**

The legislation was passed to bring operations at Virginia's two existing state-operated veterans cemeteries closer in-line with the services offered by national cemeteries. The legislation will also bring the two existing state-operated cemeteries closer in-line with the services that will be offered by the new Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery. The new cemetery will provide an outer burial container at no cost to most veterans and their families.

The construction grant provided by the National Cemetery Administration, a division of the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, for construction of the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery includes funding for 2,750 preinstalled outer burial containers. When the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery opens in 2011, most veterans and eligible family members will be provided an outer burial container at no cost. Because the preinstalled outer burial containers at the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery will only accommodate standard-size caskets, a few veterans or family members, including those with an oversized casket, will be required to purchase an outer burial container at cost.

The federal construction grants for the cemeteries in Suffolk and Amelia did not include funding for preinstalled outer burial containers. As a result, veterans have had to purchase the outer burial containers from private sellers. By offering an outer burial container for sale at cost, DVS will help reduce the financial burden on veterans and their families until the agency can obtain federal grant funding to

retrofit the two existing cemeteries. After the two existing cemeteries are retrofitted, DVS will be able to offer these free to most veterans.

### **How long will this program last?**

DVS has applied for a \$5.8 million grant to retrofit the cemeteries in Suffolk and Amelia with preinstalled outer burial containers; however, it could take two years or more for the grant to be awarded and the containers installed. As an interim measure, HB 479 enables the Commonwealth to provide outer burial containers at cost while the state waits to receive funding for retrofitting the Amelia and Suffolk cemeteries. Outer burial containers will be provided at cost until both cemeteries have been retrofitted.

### **Will veterans and their families be required to purchase an outer burial container from the Commonwealth if they are interred in one of the state-operated veterans cemeteries?**

No. While an outer burial container is required, it does not have to be purchased from the Commonwealth. Veterans and their families may purchase an outer burial container and placement services from a funeral home or other source. Placement of the privately-purchased outer burial container must be coordinated with DVS, as is done currently.

### **When will outer burial containers be available for purchase from the Department of Veterans Services?**

DVS will begin sales of outer burial containers on August 30, 2010.

### **What will the cost of the outer burial containers be?**

Veterans or families will be charged \$400 which is the cost of the outer burial container plus a small fee for placement in the ground. The fee covers the cost of the manpower and equipment required for placement.

### **May I pre-buy an outer burial container?**

No, outer burial containers will only be sold at the time of need.

### **Will oversize outer burial containers be available?**

Yes, oversize outer burial containers will be available for purchase at cost. However, even after the two existing cemeteries have been retrofitted with pre-installed outer burial containers, veterans and their families will still have to purchase oversize outer burial containers if needed. Restrictions placed by the federal grant only allow the Commonwealth to purchase standard-sized pre-installed outer burial containers with federal grant funds. The same restrictions apply to the new cemetery in Dublin. Therefore, when the two existing cemeteries have been retrofitted and the new cemetery is open, veterans and their families will be responsible for purchasing or providing an oversize outer burial container if one is needed. All three cemeteries will sell oversize outer burial containers at cost.

**If the General Assembly provided \$36,000 for purchase of the outer burial containers, why are veterans being charged?**

About half of the funding allocated by the General Assembly will be used to purchase the specialized piece of equipment necessary for moving and placing outer burial containers. The remainder of the funds will be used for the initial bulk purchase of outer burial containers. Money collected from the sale of the initial container will be channeled back into the program to fund future bulk purchases.

**How many pre-installed outer burial containers will be provided by the anticipated federal grant?**

The Commonwealth has applied for federal grant funding to retrofit the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery with 5,000 outer burial containers and the Virginia Veterans Cemetery with 2,000 outer burial containers. The pre-installed outer burial containers will accommodate both a veteran and spouse. This quantity should provide outer burial containers at no cost for approximately eight or nine years. After the majority of the pre-installed outer burial containers have been used, DVS will apply for a subsequent grant from the National Cemetery Administration.

**What's the difference between a Virginia state-operated veterans cemetery and a national veterans cemetery?**

In general, Virginia's state-operated cemeteries operate as closely as possible to national cemeteries. Pre-installation of outer burial containers at the two existing cemeteries in Suffolk and Amelia, as well as the cemetery under construction in Southwest Virginia, will follow the model of national cemeteries which provide the containers at no cost.

**Who is eligible for burial at Virginia's state-operated veterans cemeteries?**

Service members who were honorably discharged qualify for burial at Virginia's state-operated veterans cemeteries. A grave site, opening and closing of the grave for the veteran, placement of a government grave marker, and perpetual care of the site are provided to the veteran at no charge. Veterans' spouses and eligible dependent children are charged a small fee, currently \$300.

**Who can I call for additional information?**

You may call either cemetery for additional information.

Virginia Veterans Cemetery, Amelia: (804) 561-1475

Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery: (757) 255-7217