



## What Happens Next?

*What to expect after your euthanasia appointment*

### Answers to common questions

*Can I get a receipt?* We will gladly mail or email a receipt to you upon request.

*When will my pet be cremated?* Usually on the next working day (Monday through Saturday).

*When can I expect my pet's ashes to be returned to me?* Depending on your location and our schedule, it may take up to ten days to make a home delivery. Custom urns will add additional time. If you're anxious to get your pet's ashes back sooner, please let us know so we can discuss options.

*Do I need to call someone?* No, we will contact you to make arrangements when your pet's ashes are ready to come home. If you're picking up at your regular vet clinic, we'll notify their office and ask them to call you when they're ready.

*What if it's been more than a few days and I haven't heard?* Keep in mind that custom urn orders may take up to two weeks; otherwise, you are welcome to call us and we will check on the status of your pet's ashes. Rest assured that your pet will be returned safely home after cremation.

*How do I know it's my pet that I receive?* The crematory carefully tracks each pet to ensure that they are identified correctly and make it home to the right family. We have personally walked through the process with them and have utmost trust that they will handle your loved one as if he or she were their very own.

*How will I get the paw print?* If we are returning your pet's ashes to you, the paw print will be included in the package. Otherwise, we ship completed prints out in batches once or twice weekly via USPS priority mail.

*What if I choose a custom urn later?* You can have your pet's ashes returned in the mahogany urn and can transfer them later. We are more than happy to do this for you. Alternatively, we can keep them safe at the office until your new vessel arrives.

## If we are taking your pet for cremation

Cremation is offered for no extra charge. The ashes will be scattered.

**Solo Cremation and Solo Cremation Viewing (Witnessed) Cremation:** With a solo cremation, only one pet is cremated at a time. This ensures that there is absolutely no intermingling of ashes whatsoever. This is our standard option if you have requested that your pet's ashes be returned to you. You may also be present to witness the cremation process by prior arrangement. Additional charges will apply for witnessed cremations. Please contact us to learn more.

## If You're Planning a Home Burial

### Planning the Site

First get permission from the City and County Zoning Department ([roh.info@honolulu.gov](mailto:roh.info@honolulu.gov), or call 768-3809), as well as your homeowner's association if you have one. General guidelines:

- Burial must take place on land that you own, or with permission of the landowner. Burial on public lands is not permitted.
- It may be illegal to bury remains in bodies of water or watersheds that feed the drinking water supply. The burial site, regardless of location, must be above the water table. Also consult your utility companies about the location of underground lines or pipes before you dig. Don't forget that digging and/or the natural breakdown of fresh organic matter may be harmful to a tree's root system, which *generally* extends about as far as the outer leaves and branches of its canopy.
- The grave should be at least four feet deep to provide protection from wildlife, other pets, or weather conditions. This is often impossible in Hawaii. Alternatively, cover the burial site with a heavy, solid barrier, such as large rocks, for a minimum of 6-9 months.
- You can wait up to 24-36 hours before burial. You may wish to protect the body from insects with blankets or mosquito netting and provide an absorbent material underneath the hindquarters and head. Chemical changes in the muscles will occur 3-4 hours (sometimes earlier) after death and will prevent further repositioning. Odors are usually not a problem within this time frame, but essential oils such as lavender or peppermint can help, and will also deter insects.

### What to Expect - Changes After Death

You should be aware of what changes to expect in the next few hours. You may find some of these details graphic, but you'll be less likely to be upset if you understand what is happening.

We will tell you that your pet has passed away when we can no longer detect a heartbeat with a stethoscope. However, it's more realistic and helpful to think of death as a phase or transition that the body passes through, with various changes happening over time.

**Flexibility.** All muscles will at first be in a state of deep relaxation; as chemical changes occur, they will gradually become more stiff and inflexible, until the head and limbs cannot be moved at all (if you have heard the term *rigor mortis*, this is what it means). References state this takes 3-4 hours, but we have noticed these changes beginning in as early as 1-2 hours. After several days, the muscles will once again return to a state of deep relaxation. **What to do:** If you need to make any changes in your pet's position (e.g. to fit into a prepared burial site, casket, or shroud), keep in mind that this may be impossible in as soon as 1.5 - 2 hours.

**Breathing and movement.** For up to an hour or so following death, you may see isolated deep breaths or small muscle movements (usually around the muzzle or feet). The body is simply releasing energy, and although normal and quite common, it can be startling if you're not prepared for it. **What to do:** There is nothing that you need to do except remind yourself that this is a natural process and no cause for concern.

**Temperature.** Body temperature will gradually decrease until it's the same as the surrounding environment. This takes quite a few hours depending on the size of the pet, the surrounding air temperature, and other factors. You may notice coolness in the feet or legs first. **What to do:** There is nothing you need to do.

**Fluids.** It is not uncommon for urine or stools to be voided in the first minutes or hours. Less commonly, fluid or blood may flow from the nose or mouth. **What to do:** You can control and manage soiling with an absorbent underpad. Puppy pads and towels work fine. If you wish, you can clean up whatever is released with water and vinegar, wipes, or waterless shampoo.

**Odors.** This is usually not a problem but is included because it's a common worry. In the first 24-36 hours following death, the breakdown of tissues will not produce strong odors, even in warmer environments. Any that do occur are usually caused by the release of stools or gases. **What to do:** Objectionable smells are easily addressed by removing any soiling that has occurred (see above under Fluids). Essential oils such as peppermint, lavender, or eucalyptus can be diffused or applied to bedding. You may also burn candles or incense, sprinkle baking soda around the body, and provide good ventilation.

**Pests.** This is potentially an issue, mostly if the pet is being held outdoors. If you follow the above guidelines for managing odors, it is usually not a big problem in the first 1-2 days. **What to do:** If you're concerned about insects, you can protect the body with a burial shroud or blanket (ask for instructions on making a wrap), netting, or even a screened enclosure. Most pests find peppermint oil objectionable, or you can use citronella as a deterrent.

**Other pets.** There is generally no need to separate other pets. Usually they will check things out and sniff around (that's how they understand and process their world), and will then keep their distance. It would be prudent to keep pets in a separate room when unsupervised.

### **Moving and Transportation**

Moving larger pets is actually easier once the muscles have become rigid, so a reasonable option would be to wait a few hours if you can. You can place the pet on his or her side and tuck the legs up by the body (like they're curled up for a nap). A sturdy blanket can make a stretcher.

Provide support for the head if it's not covered by a blanket and muscles are still relaxed. Some people find it upsetting when an unsupported head moves in a way we are not accustomed to.

A relaxed, full bladder may empty when pressure is applied around the lower abdomen (as in lifting). One or two thick towels will absorb anything if this is a concern.

It is not necessary to use a bag, wrap, or box to either bury or transport a pet's remains, but you may wish to do so for the comfort of grieving family members. There is no need to refrain from touching for the first 36 hours. Some people, especially children, take comfort in lovingly brushing and grooming the pet prior to burial or cremation. Grief is a very personal experience, so just do what feels right to you.