



Green Burial Council
Burial Grounds Standards/Eco-Rating System
Effective as of January 1, 2011

The Green Burial Council certifies three categories of cemeteries:

1. Hybrid Burial Grounds (One Leaf Rating)
2. Natural Burial Grounds (Two Leaf Rating)
3. Conservation Burial Grounds (Three Leaf Rating)

The order in which these categories are listed and discussed reflects increasing requirements to meet the particular standard. Each level of certification is in addition to the previous-level(s) requirements. Please refer to the summaries provided below and to Table 1. Titled "Burial Grounds Standards/Eco-Rating System Comparison" for a discussion and comparison of criteria for each level.

- Hybrid Burial Grounds are conventional cemeteries offering the option for burial without the need for a vault (partial, inverted or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner. Hybrid Burial Grounds shall not require the embalming of decedents and must allow for any kind of eco-friendly burial containers including shrouds.
- Natural Burial Grounds require the adoption of practices/protocols that are energy-conserving, minimize waste, and do not require the use of toxic chemicals. A Natural Burial Ground achieves GBC certification by prohibiting the use of vaults (partial, inverted or otherwise), vault lids, concrete boxes, slabs or partitioned liners, and by prohibiting the burial of decedents embalmed with toxic chemicals, as well as by banning burial containers not made from natural/plant derived materials. It must have in place a program of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and be designed, operated and maintained to produce a naturalistic appearance, based on use of plants and materials native to the region, and patterns of landscape derived from and compatible with regional ecosystems.
- Conservation Burial Grounds, in addition to meeting all the requirements for a Natural Burial Ground, must further legitimate land conservation. It must protect in perpetuity an area of land specifically and exclusively designated for conservation. A Conservation Burial Ground must involve an established conservation organization that holds a conservation easement or has in place a deed restriction guaranteeing long-term stewardship.



Green Burial Council

Table 1. Burial Grounds Standards/Eco-Rating System Comparison

	Criteria	Hybrid	Natural Burial Grounds	Conservation Burial Grounds
CUSTOMER RELATIONS CRITERIA				
1.	Information regarding green burials needs to be present on the cemetery website.	√	√	√
2.	Representations made through websites, in marketing materials, to members of the media, as well as the naming of any affiliated businesses owned by the cemetery operator, must not have the effect of misleading the public or “blur the lines” between the different levels of GBC certified burial grounds.	√	√	√
3.	Clients and families must be given the opportunity to be involved with the burial and ritual process so long as participation does not conflict with state law or with these protocols in form or substance.	√	√	√
FUNERAL HOME CRITERIA				
4.	A funeral home that operates on the premises of any GBC-certified Burial Ground must also be certified by the Green Burial Council.	√	√	√
LEGAL CRITERIA				
5.	Adherence to the certification requirements at any level must be guaranteed by deed restriction, conservation easement, or other legally binding and irrevocable agreement. Such agreement(s) must run with the land and be enforceable in perpetuity, equivalent to the force of requirements for perpetual maintenance of conventional cemeteries. In some instances, the GBC will allow for nonprofit operators to utilize cemetery “rules and regulations” as a means of memorializing the GBC approved protocols/practices.	N/A	√	√



	Criteria	Hybrid	Natural Burial Grounds	Conservation Burial Grounds
GENERAL CRITERIA				
6.	The facility shall not require the use of a vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner.	√	See criteria 7	See criteria 7
7.	The facility, or designated portion of the facility, must be reserved for burial that does not require the use of a vault (partial, inverted, or otherwise), a vault lid, concrete box, slab or partitioned liner.	N/A	√	√
8.	Facility cannot require embalming of decedents.	√	See criteria 9	See criteria 9
9.	Decedents are not to have been embalmed, or embalmed only with GBC approved nontoxic chemicals.	See criteria 8	√	√
10.	Eco-friendly burial containers of any kind are to be accommodated, including the use of shrouds.	√	See criteria 11	See criteria 11
11.	Burial containers are to be limited to those made from materials that are nontoxic/nonhazardous and natural/plant derived, with shrouds permissible.	See criteria 10	√	√
12.	An Integrated Pest Management (IPM) must be implemented, so as to prohibit the use of pesticides other than instances where required to eradicate invasive species.	N/A	√	√
START-UP CRITERIA				
13.	Conduct an assessment (to be done by an independent professional in the field of biology/restoration ecology) that identifies any issues related to endangered species of plants/animals, cultural resources, and hydrology.	N/A	√	See criteria 14



	Criteria	Hybrid	Natural Burial Grounds	Conservation Burial Grounds
14.	Conduct a biological evaluation including baseline information on existing geology, hydrology, soils, and topography, and on both existing and potential vegetation and wildlife. This evaluation must be used by the facility designers and operators to ensure that existing site resources are not degraded, and that the potential for reintroducing native species is given appropriate consideration in design and planning.	N/A	See criteria 13	√
15.	Conduct an evaluation to determine potential erosion issues and measures necessary to prevent them.	N/A	N/A	√
16.	Develop a plan for limiting visitation to sensitive areas.	N/A	√	See criteria 17
17.	Develop a plan for limiting visitation to sensitive areas as well as policies for families who choose “back country” or “off trail” burial	N/A	See criteria 16	√
18.	Compile a plant list for use as memorial features for every area or “zone” of the property where burial will take place, and a list of plants appropriate for use in restoration and/or preservation of native vegetation.	N/A	N/A	√
19.	Develop a plan for limiting the types, sizes, and visibility of memorial markers/features to preserve or restore naturalistic vistas in the cemetery landscape and (where appropriate) the placement of landmarks outside its borders.	N/A	√	√
OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT CRITERIA				
20.	Develop a plan for dealing with unauthorized grave decoration and landscaping.	N/A	√	√
21.	Develop a “systems and operations” manual to be given to all staff members, contractors, and volunteers that communicates the above criteria and the goals and methods of meeting them.	N/A	√	√



	Criteria	Hybrid	Natural Burial Grounds	Conservation Burial Grounds
22.	Establish an endowment fund to ensure the long term maintenance of the land and its trail system by setting aside at least 5% of all burial plot sales.	N/A	√	√
23.	Develop a plan for using native plants and for protecting or rescuing locally rare plants.	N/A	N/A	√
24.	Utilize excavation and burial techniques/technology that minimizes impacts on surrounding land, and protects native plant diversity.	N/A	N/A	√
LAND CRITERIA				
25.	Be contiguous to, or in a position to augment the conservation goals of an ecologically significant park, wildlife corridor, critical habitat area, or permanently protected open space; or (with appropriate management practices) be large enough on its own to be considered a landscape-level conservation effort.	N/A	N/A	√
26.	Operate only in areas of the property where burial would not degrade the land and the surrounding landscape.	N/A	N/A	√
27.	Be owned by, or operated in conjunction with a government agency or nonprofit conservation organization that is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a public charity and in business for at least five years (the “conservation partner”). The conservation partner must have legally binding responsibility for perpetual stewardship of the land, both in the operational facility and in the conservation area(s), and must set all conservation policies.	N/A	N/A	√



	Criteria	Hybrid	Natural Burial Grounds	Conservation Burial Grounds
28.	Adherence to the certification requirements must be guaranteed by deed restriction, conservation easement, or other legally binding and irrevocable agreement. Such agreement(s) must run with the land and be enforceable in perpetuity, equivalent to the force of requirements for perpetual maintenance of conventional cemeteries. In some instances, the GBC will allow for nonprofit operators of to utilize cemetery “rules and regulations” as a means of memorializing the GBC approved protocols/practices	N/A	√	See criteria 29
29.	Utilize a deed restriction (if operator is a nonprofit conservation organization that has been established for at least five years) or a conservation easement that incorporates these standards. A conservation easement must also conform to all provisions of the Internal Revenue Code Section 170(h) and provide for public access to and through the site, particularly to connect it to adjoining protected open space, to the extent public use of the property is compatible with ecological goals.	N/A	N/A	√