Parish Council of Coleford

Miss V Watts
Clerk to the Council
Tel: 07971 516916
Email: clerkcolefordsomerset@gmail.com

Gallant Hill Farm
Foxcote
Radstock
BA3 5YB

Grave Digging Code of Practice

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Grave Digging Code of Practice

Contents

1. The Policy

It is Coleford Parish Council's policy to ensure a high standard of grave digging whilst maintaining safety and dignity at all times throughout the process. This extends beyond the day of interment to the weeks and months afterwards when the soil is settling to ensure that all graves are maintained to the highest standard.

2. Grave Digging – General Requirements

Grave digging is only to be undertaken by an experienced contractor approved by Coleford Parish Council. The grave digging contractor must ensure that everyone engaged in grave digging is qualified and competent to undertake the work.

Appropriate safety footwear must be worn at all times.

A hard hat must be worn when working in an excavation.

Eye and hearing protection must be worn when appropriate based on a risk assessment of the activities being undertaken.

Any grave that is left unattended for whatever reason must be completely boarded over or barriers erected in such a manner as to prevent any person falling into the grave.

Entry and egress from a grave must be by ladder. On **No-account** must a gravedigger climb out of a grave by treading on any part of the shoring. A ladder must remain in place whenever an operative is working in a grave in order to maintain an emergency exit.

All finished graves should be prepared using imitation grass matting. The matting will be laid out neatly on staging leaving no folds or gaps which may cause Funeral Director, members of the Clergy, mourners or member of staff to trip. Walk boards/staging must be laid along the length of the grave and supported at each end and must be capable of carrying the weight of the Pall Bearers and Coffin.

All graves must be dug centrally within the allocated grave location and to the exact dimensions as agreed with the Parish Clerk . Due account must be taken of the proximity of existing graves as there is an increased the risk of collapse, as the intervening wall of undug soil on one side will be of reduced thickness.

Any nearby/adjacent memorials which pose a hazard to the grave digger must be temporarily moved to a safe distance from the grave to be excavated and replaced immediately following the interment. If memorials need to be moved the Parish Clerk must be informed before any disturbance made and if possible the owners of the memorial will be contacted and advised that this is necessary to reduce the risk to the grave digger and also protect their particular memorial from damage should the grave being prepared collapse and their memorial fall.

Any foul odours encountered should be reported immediately to the Parish Clerk

A second person is to be in attendance whenever work is being carried out in an excavation of depth greater than 3' (0.91m).

All tools and equipment required to complete each grave must be available nearby before digging commences.

All excavation shall be shored up using proprietary equipment design for the purpose and the equipment used in accordance with the manufacturer instructions..

Shoring equipment should be inspected before each use and serviced by a qualified person, as necessary.

DEFECTIVE UNITS MUST NOT BE USED**.**

Lowering webbings and putlogs must be inspected prior to each burial to ensure that no deterioration has occurred and that they are capable of taking the weight of the coffin. Frayed webbings should not be used.

3. Pre-Excavation Preparation

3.1.1 General

It is extremely important that grave diggers follow the advice contained within this Code and ensure a safe working environment for all Cemetery operatives/visitors when excavating a grave, including themselves. It is important that grave diggers are experienced/trained to be able to safely assess the working site, including memorials, assess the risk, record the assessment accurately, follow an approved reporting process and understand the range of options available for making the area safe for all who will use it.

3.1.2 Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is central to ensuring a safe working environment. Grave digging within the burial ground should be covered by a suitable risk assessment and safe system of work as identified in appendix 1 of this Code. When assessing the hazards on a potential excavation site a number of decisions need to be made based on sound risk assessment principles:

What areas of the burial process need to be considered during site preparation – Consideration should be given to the range of hazards that may exist around the excavation area. Consideration should be given to activities that will subsequently take place:

1. Safe and easy access for operatives and equipment
2. Safe access for persons attending and officiating at the burial service
3. The health and safety of operatives during the excavation process
4. The health and safety of Cemetery visitors

What range of hazards exist in the area surrounding the grave to be excavated? – When considering the safety of the site before, after and during excavation work the following bust be considered:

1. Ground conditions – proper consideration of the ground conditions surrounding the grave and on the route to the graveside should be taken account of with particular care to be taken when areas contain multiple trip hazards. Safe route, proper footwear and care in unstable or wet/slippery conditions should be emphasised in risk assessment for this work
2. Memorials – memorials present specific hazards and must be dealt with according to the Guidance produced by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC).
3. Correct positioning and marking out of grave – this is essential as reduced midfeathers in otherwise stable conditions can create a false impression of safe excavation conditions.
4. Protection of excavation
5. Vegetation – proper consideration should be given to the effect of any evasive vegetation or work being carried out around trees that have low branches or unsafe branches.
6. Undermining of nearby structures –

The above risk assessment information is for guidance purposes only, lists are not to be considered all-inclusive but indicative of the types of risks that should be considered. Further guidance should be sought from the Parish Clerk who is responsible for health and safety for the Coleford Parish Council as the Burial Authority.

3.2 Locating Graves – Measuring and Marking

All graves to be excavated should be located and identified on the statutory grave plan. The location is to be agreed advance with the Parish Clerk.

All graves must be dug centrally within their respective grave spaces for the following reasons:

1. If grave is not dug centrally within its respective grave space one of the walls separating the adjacent grave will be of a narrower width and will increase the risk of collapse of that side of the grave.
2. When reopening a grave that was previously dug out of centre the risk of collapse is increased.
3. When a memorial is erected centrally on a grave that was dug out of centre the risk of the memorial subsiding and tilting is increased which in turn increases the risk of the memorial becoming unstable and a danger in its own right.

3.3 Walk boards/Work Platform

Hazard Checklist and Risk Assessment (see appendix 1)

Hazard	Type of Harm	Frequency Rating	Severity Rating	Risk Rating
Unprotected grave edges	Impact injuries from fall	3	3	9
Insecure soil box	Crushing/Trapping	3	3	9
Material falling from soil box into grave	Impact injuries	3	3	9
Unstable Walk boards	Impact injuries from fall	3	3	9
Soil box too close to edge of grave	Impact from fall of soil/stones etc into grave. Trapping/crushing in collapsed grave	3	4	12

3.3.1 Walk boards
Walk boards must be placed along each side of the grave to be dug that are supported on boards placed across the head and foot ends of the grave. This action will spread the weight of operatives and prevent falls due to crumbling surface edges.

Walk boards should remain in place for the whole of the burial process, i.e. placed before excavation commences and not removed until after backfilling is completed.

3.3.2 Work Platform
A work platform can be provided by replacing the head and foot boards with boards of 6'6" (1.95m) in length. This action will enable two more boards to be laid along the length of one side of the grave to create a platform 4' (1.22m) wide.

3.4 Soil Box
A Soil Box (soil tidy) should ideally be erected to contain the excavated material. This structure must be securely erected so that pressure from the soil inside does not cause it to collapse. The use of a soil box will assist with protection of nearby memorials and turf and is recommended best practice.

The soil box should be situated no closer than 2' (0.61m) from the edge of the excavation so as to reduce pressure near to the edges of the grave and therefore reduce the risk of collapse. Consideration should be given to increasing the distance of the box from the edge of the grave where unfavourable ground conditions exist.

The soil in the box should be sloped (battered) away from the grave so as to reduce the weight at the side nearest to the grave. A front board can be placed across the front of the box to stop soil, stones, etc from rolling off the soil stack and onto any operative who may be working in the grave.

It is advisable to estimate and remove excess soil from the grave (i.e. soil that would remain after backfilling is completed) before the soil box is used. This action will keep the amount of soil placed in the box to a minimum and will reduce pressure within the box and subsequently the risk of the box collapsing.

4. Excavation and Ground Support

4.1 Preliminaries and Preparation

All tools and equipment required to complete the excavation process must be available at close proximity to the grave to be excavated before digging commences.

4.2 Machine Excavation

Hazard Checklist and Risk Assessment (see appendix 1)

Hazard	Type of Harm	Frequency Rating	Severity Rating	Risk Rating
Weight of machine on ground causing collapse of grave	Crushing/Trapping	3	4	12
Vibration of machine causing collapse of grave	Crushing/Trapping	3	4	12
Impact with moving boom	Impact injuries	3	4	12
Impact with moving machine	Impact injuries	3	4	12
Fumes entering grave	Asphyxiation	3	4	12
Noise from machine	Tinnitus/deafness	2	3	6

Only authorised trained persons should be permitted to operate grave digging machines.

The machine operator must ensure that no person stands within the area of the radius of the machine boom or bucket.

When moving a digging machine within the Cemetery the driver must exercise caution and treat the roads and grounds with respect.

When a machine is not in use, it must be parked on hard ground in such a manner that it does not cause an obstruction to traffic or pedestrians. When parked, the boom must be lowered with the bucket resting on solid ground. The ignition key must be removed. The blade on tracked machines must be in the down position whenever the vehicle is parked.

The machine operator must ensure that the machine is safely manoeuvred into the digging position. Legs/stabilisers must be correctly positioned as far away as is practicable from the grave to be excavated. Placing stabilisers on purpose built bearers can spread the weight of the machine.

The blade on a tracked machine must be in the down position at all times when digging is in progress.

The operator must ensure that the machine is level before digging commences so as to ensure that the sides of the grave are vertical.

It is possible that exhaust fumes from the engine can collect in the bottom of the grave. Where possible the machine should be positioned downwind of the excavation to reduce the risk of this occurring. The risk is increased on days when there is no breeze.

Care must be taken when excavating a grave whilst shoring is in place so as to avoid striking any part of the shoring equipment with the machine bucket.

Digging machines must be operated in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.
Machines should be regularly serviced by a qualified person.

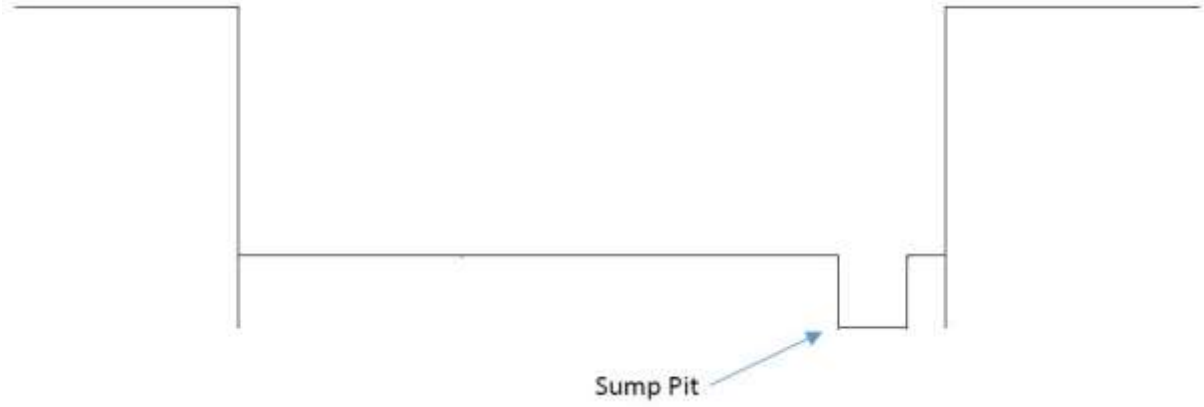
Machine operators should be trained to carry out pre-start checks and routine maintenance.

4.3 Hand Excavation

Shoring must be incorporated as digging proceeds and must support the full depth of the grave

On completion of each excavation the gravedigger must ensure that the sides and ends of the grave are vertical and that the bottom of the grave is level. Shoring units must be level.

4.4 Dealing with Ground Water
Should water collect in a grave it should be removed prior to the interment. Ideally a motorised pump should be used, as this action will not require a gravedigger to enter the grave. The hose from the pump can be lowered into the grave from surface level.
When conditions indicate that water may collect in a grave a sump pit can be dug in the bottom of the grave towards one end.



The hose from the pump can be placed in the sump pit and as water is pumped out of the pit the remaining water in the grave will be drawn towards the pit thus leaving the greater part of the bottom of the grave dry.

When hand digging a sump pit can be kept open at one end with the gravedigger working away from it. This action will assist in reducing the amount of mud created on the bottom of the grave.

When machine digging a sump pit can be dug when final hand levelling off the bottom of the grave is carried out.

Should water be removed from a grave using a petrol driven pump no gravedigger should be working in the grave while the pump is running as exhaust fumes may enter the grave and collect at the bottom. (Exhaust fumes are heaving than air). Ideally the pump should be positioned as far away from the grave as possible and positioned down wind.

Water removed from a grave should ideally be pumped into the nearest soak away or sewer. Should foul odours be encountered the Parish Clerk must be informed immediately. Phenolic disinfectant should be used if required.

[Attention is drawn to the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 which states "no person ….. shall remove therefrom any soil which is offensive" (Part 1 of Schedule 2).]

4.5 Dumper Trucks
Dumper trucks should be regularly serviced and maintained by a suitably qualified person.

The driver must carry out daily pre-start checks and report any faults however minor in order to prevent such faults worsening and becoming hazards. The employer and driver have legal obligations to ensure that a dumper truck is not only safe to use under health and safety legislation but complies with other statutory provisions in relation to road worthiness i.e. lights, tyres, road fund licence if used on public highway etc.

The driver must ensure that the dumper truck is not overloaded in terms of weight as this can dramatically affect the handling/steering of the truck.

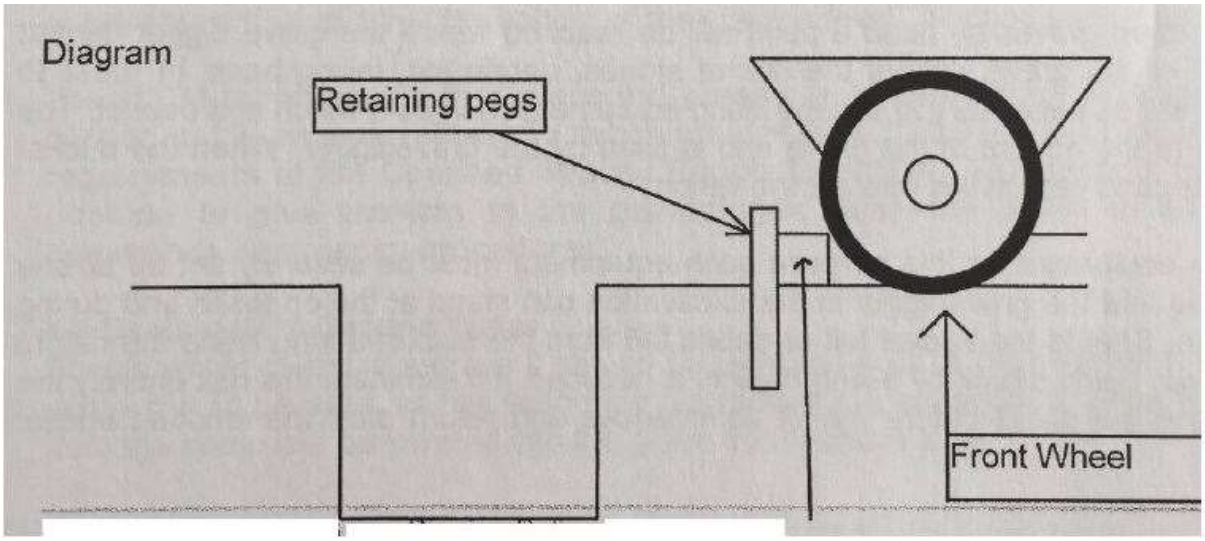
Load should not be so high as to obstruct the all-round view of the driver.

Within the Cemetery the driver must exercise caution and treat the roads and grounds with respect and adhere to the appropriate speed limit when driving on the public highway. The driver must hold the appropriate licence.

When a dumper is being used to remove excess spoil from a grave great care must be taken when manoeuvring into place. The dumper should be stopped as far away as is practicable from the grave so as to minimise the risk of collapse of the grave caused by the weight or vibration of the machine.

No person should be working in a grave when a dumper is being manoeuvred into position, being filled with soil or being driven away.

A stop block can be placed at a pre-determined distance from the excavation to prevent the dumper truck from being driving too close. The stop block will reduce the risk of accident should a driver error/misjudgement occur or if the breaks fail.



5. Preparation for Interment

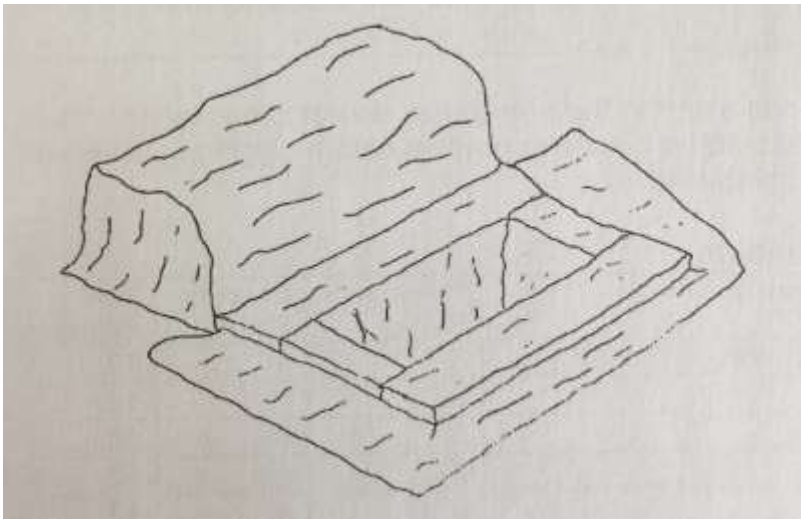
Hazard Checklist and Risk Assessment (see appendix 1)

Hazard	**Type of Harm**	**Frequency Rating**	**Severity Rating**	**Risk Rating**
Limited access	Impact injuries from Trip/Fall	3	3	9
Unstable walk boards	"	3	3	9
Folded or torn grass matting	"	3	3	9
Frayed webbing breaking	Back/muscle strain. Injuries from falling	3	3	9
Insecure nearby memorials	Injuries from Crushing/Trapping	3	4	12

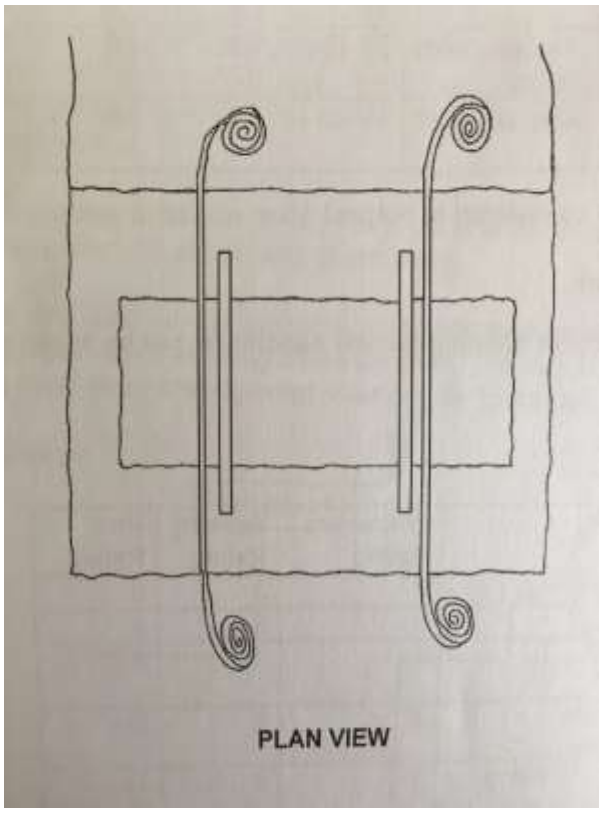
Prior to preparing/dressing the grave the surrounding area should be examined to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable a safe, unobstructed access for Funeral Directors staff, clergy and mourners.

Any trip hazards that may be present must be removed.

Walk boards must be checked for stability with adjustments made as required. Unstable walk boards may cause a pall bearer(s) to fall whilst placing a coffin onto putlogs.



Care must be taken to avoid trip hazards caused by folds in the matting. Torn or holed matting must not be used.

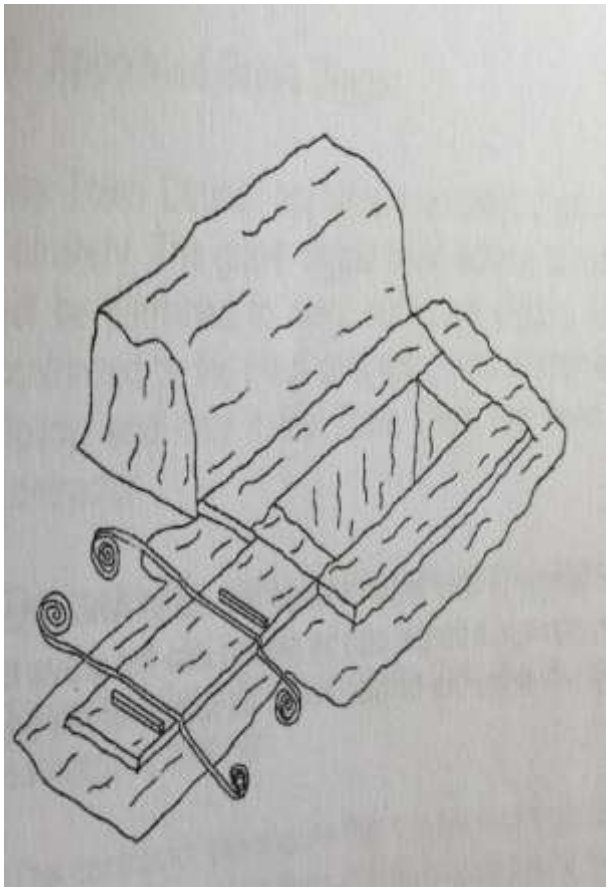


Two putlogs should be placed across the grave onto which the coffin may be placed prior to the committal. Putlogs should be 4'6" X 4" (1.37m x 102mm x 102mm) and of good quality knot free planed timber.

The distance between the putlogs should be no less than 3'6" (1.07m).

Two lowering webbings are placed as shown in the diagram. Care must be taken to ensure that sufficient webbing is placed on either side of the grave to enable each pallbearer to lower the coffin to the bottom of the grave.

Webbings should be checked for signs of deterioration or fraying before each burial service. Frayed or damaged webbings must not be used and should be cut down to prevent use by any other person.



In some instances there may be insufficient space to the side of the grave for the pallbearers to safely carry the coffin and place it on putlogs directly over the grave.

A safer method for this situation is to place a board at either the foot or head end of the grave covered with grass matting on which to place the coffin. Two putlogs are placed across the board so that the coffin can be rested down with no risk of pallbearers trapping fingers. The lowering webbings are also placed across the board.

At the appropriate time during the committal service the pallbearers can lift the coffin using the webbings and walk along the walk boards and safely lower the coffin into the grave

6. Backfilling

6.1. General Requirements and Considerations

Backfilling should commence immediately after all mourners have left the cemetery and be completed fully on the same working day.

Webbings and grass mats must be removed before backfilling commences.

Walk boards should be left in place during the whole of the backfilling procedure so as to prevent persons walking on any unprotected grave edge.

In order to reduce later subsidence and settlement of the grave, all backfill materials (including the material placed between the liners or vaults and sides of opened graves), shall be tamped and compacted in layers not to exceed 150mm in depth so that a compacted density of 90 percent shall result, using soil free from large lumps. **The grave is to be finished with a tidy mound of soil, covered with saved (and if necessary, imported) turfs to leave an immaculate finish.** The importance of this action cannot be stressed highly enough as the reduction of instances where the bereaved may be confronted with sunken graves is imperative. It will also subsequently reduce the risk of the memorial tilting and thereby becoming unstable.

Monitoring of the condition of the backfilled grave is to be carried out weekly within the first month and thereafter at regular intervals (at least monthly). Remedial work must be undertaken immediately if there is soil settlement leading to an untidy, uneven or sunken surface and/or if the turves show signs of drought or die-back. The responsibility for monitoring and maintenance rests with the grave digger.

7. Funeral Directors

Whilst the Parish Council and the Funeral Director will combine to serve the same client it is important to also combine in the interest of health and safety

Funeral Directors may be requested to provide their risk assessments, safe systems or work and staff training information together with a copy of their public liability insurance certificates.

8. Contractors and others working in the Cemetery

All contractors working in Coleford Cemetery must comply with all legislative requirements and provide copies of policies, risk assessments, safe systems of work, staff training records, COSHH assessments, insurance certificates etc *prior to undertaking any work on site*.

As Coleford Parish Council is owner and occupier of the Cemetery it has ultimate duty of care under health and safety legislation and must therefore set the standards required and closely monitor activities of contractors so as to ensure compliance.

9. Appointed Grave Digger

The grave digging contractor is to be employed by the organization arranging the funeral using a contractor approved by Coleford Parish Council. (see Coleford Parish Council Cemetery Policy).

The grave digging contractor and employer shall follow the guidance given in this Code of Practise and all relevant Health and Safety at Work regulations.

It is recommended that grave digging contractor operatives receive training under the Cemetery Operatives Training Scheme administered by the Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management IMMC).

Appendix 1

Risk Assessment

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 require employers to carry out risk assessments, make arrangements to implement necessary measures, appoint competent people and arrange for appropriate information and training. This Code has been formulated by first considering the hazards that may be present within a cemetery.

Definitions of Risk and Hazard

The Health and Safety Executive define a hazard as something with the potential to cause harm. Risk is the likelihood of that potential being realised.

When assessing risk it is important to consider the health and safety of not only employees but also persons who use the cemetery.

In some instances the actions of persons other than employees need to be considered with measures being employed to control possible risk, i.e. regulations and procedures for controlling and monitoring the activity of memorial masons, and contractors.

Security measures may need to be taken to attempt to reduce incidence of vandalism.

The activity of vandals can give rise to hazards.

Method of Assessing Risk

For the purposes of constructing this Code of Safe Working Practice a list of hazards that may be encountered in most cemeteries was compiled.

Frequency ratings were then considered for each hazard with a figure being applied that reflects the probability of the potential of the hazard being realised.

Frequency

1. A highly improbable occurrence
2. A remotely possible but known occurrence
3. An occasional occurrence
4. A fairly frequent occurrence
5. A frequent and regular occurrence
6. A certainty

The Severity of the harm caused by the potential of the hazard being realised was next considered with a figure being applied.

Severity

1. Negligible injuries
2. Minor injuries
3. Major Injuries
4. Single fatality
5. Multiple fatalities
6. Multiple fatalities including ones off site

The risk rating for each hazard is calculated by multiplying the probable frequency rating by the severity rating.

The risk ratings highlight the areas of greater risk where added precautions, training and vigilance are required.

The risk assessments for the hazards associated with each section of this Code are contained in tables placed at the beginning of each section.

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