



Dispelling the myth about cardboard coffins

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Your coffin is probably the most symbolic item at your funeral, so it is only right to use a style of coffin befitting your beliefs, needs and lifestyle. The thought of choosing a traditional coffin can be perceived to be at odds with a sustainable way of life and incompatible with environmental ethics and social responsibility.

Cardboard coffins

Corrugated cardboard coffins may appear to present a green image and are perceived as a low cost alternative to traditional coffins, but in fact they're not as cheap and environmentally friendly as they look, particularly if they're made from recycled cardboard. In reality, cardboard coffins have a significant carbon footprint. The amount of energy, water and toxic chemicals used to make the cardboard is expensive for the environment, and the overall cost to the planet may be more than that of a solid pine or chipboard veneer coffin.

Pine trees, from sustainable forests, provide the basic raw material to make corrugated cardboard. However, the branches are stripped from the trunks, torn into small chips and cooked in a solution of sodium hydroxide and other strong alkalis such as sulphates, sulphides and sulphites which dissolve the substance holding the wood fibres together. More cleaning and refining takes place before the slurry of wood pulp is pressed through steam heated rollers, dried and rolled. Other raw materials, such as corn starch glue, are used to bond the corrugated cardboard to the liner sheets. This, mixed with water and chemicals, is spread onto the layers, before they are passed over heated rollers to cure the glue.

Some cardboard is manufactured using recycled packaging rather than trees. This may, on the face of it, appear to be more environmentally friendly. However, in most cases this process includes the mechanical pulping of timber fibres with large quantities

of water, followed by screening and cleaning of pulp using strong chemicals to de-ink and wash the pulp. The pulp is then bleached with peroxide to remove other contaminants. The leftover waste sludge is buried or incinerated.

Timber, wicker and veneered chipboard coffins

Most timber and wicker coffins are made from materials that are a renewable resource, from a sustainable industry. Chipboard is made by pressing timber fibres together with glue and heat to form boards, the timber fibres can be from new timber or recycled waste wood. Chipboard accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is of a guaranteed standard and a high percentage of recycled wood, also any virgin fibre used must be from a FSC source. In fact, the recycled content of the veneered chipboard that is made into coffins means they use fewer chemicals, glues, energy and water than cardboard coffins.