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Obese woman's body fat causes Austrian crematorium to burn down

Published June 06, 2012 NewsCore

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GRAZ, AUSTRIA – A devastating fire which gutted a crematorium in southern Austria was caused by an obese woman's excessive body fat blocking an air filter, Austrian public broadcaster ORF reported.

The fire occurred at the facility in the city of Graz in mid-April. Firefighters had trouble extinguishing the blaze due to a thick layer of insulation lining the crematorium's walls.

Austrian officials investigating the fire found that it was caused by the burning body of the 440-pound woman. The obese corpse reportedly led to overheating in the crematorium's filter system, triggering the blaze.

Other recent fires caused by the burning of obese bodies were reported in Germany and Switzerland.

Former Graz city fire chief Otto Widetschek said special crematoria for obese people should be set up in Austria to deal with the potential dangers of cremating obese bodies.

"In Switzerland, there is now a special crematorium for XXL-bodies," he told ORF earlier this week.

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Dozens of mourners forced to flee crematorium after backdraft from open oven doors fills chapel with smoke

By Sara Malm

PUBLISHED: 11:27 EST, 27 May 2012 | UPDATED: 11:30 EST, 27 May 2012

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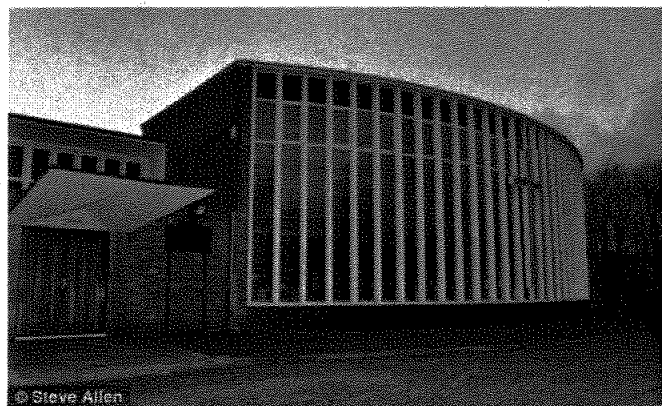
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Fire crews were called to put out a fire in a crematorium after a faulty door filled the chapel with fire and smoke.

Dozens of mourners at a funeral service in Manchester had to flee when the furnace doors failed to close behind a coffin.

As one service was about to finish something went wrong and the doors on the furnace failed to shut properly after the coffin went in.



Mourners were forced to wait outside Blackley Crematorium after the fire and smoke caused a pile-up in services with hearses waiting in line outside

Flames were pouring out when the fault was spotted by two crematorium workers who immediately stopped the conveyor belt and called for help.

Fire crews raced to Blackley Crematorium to tackle the still-burning coffin as dozens of mourners gathered outside, Manchester Evening News reports.

The mayhem caused a delay to the following services resulting in a 'Carry On' style scene with a traffic jam of hearses waiting while the fire was put out.

One mourner, who was waiting for the next service, said: 'The vicar came out and told us that there would be a delay because the building had caught fire. You couldn't see anything but you could smell it.'

'We had a bit of a laugh about it - you don't expect a cremation to be stopped because of a fire.'



Drama: With smoke billowing into the chapel mourners were forced to flee the scene at the crematorium

Another added: 'It was like a Carry On film. They do the funerals one after the other so there was a bit of a back up. There were a couple of hearses backed up and two fire engines.'

A spokesman for Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service said: 'Crews from Chadderton and Blackley were called to a fire at Blackley Crematorium, on Victoria Avenue, at 1.30pm on Thursday, May 24.

'The fire involved the cremator in a single-storey building. Two firefighters wearing breathing apparatus put out the fire which had caused damage to a coffin.'

Another mourner, on their way to the next service, said: 'We were stopped at the gate and told that we couldn't go up.'

Barrie Jones, head of bereavement services for Manchester Council, said: 'This was a minor incident and we were quickly able to resume our normal service to bereaved families.

'There was, unfortunately, a delay of around an hour to one funeral and we are liaising with the family, through the funeral director, who have been very understanding.'

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Fire Hazard: Surge in Obesity Sparks Crematorium Blazes

By Ulf Hanke

As the number of obese Germans rises, the funeral industry is scrambling to make adjustments in how larger bodies with more fat can be safely incinerated. A number of crematoriums have suffered severe damage when burning fat overwhelmed their emergency measures.

April 13, 2012 - 05:33 PM

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Obese bodies have led to fire emergencies at several German crematoriums.

The crematorium employee in the western German town of Hamelin took a last look at the coffin before pushing it inside the furnace. This was the third coffin he had processed on the morning of January 13, and the body itself weighed over 200 kilograms (440 pounds). Of that, only two kilograms of ashes were supposed to remain after cremation. But, 15 minutes later, flames shot out of the crematorium's 10-meter-high (33-foot-high) stainless-steel chimney, and parts of it began to melt.

Unable to bring the fire under control, the employee called the fire department. Firemen determined that the smoking chimney was glowing at 600 degrees Celsius (1,100 degrees Fahrenheit). They cooled it from the side and used an infrared camera to track the spread of heat through the building. It took four hours to reduce the body in the furnace to ash.

ANZEIGE



Cremations in Germany are becoming more complicated owing to an increase in obesity. At the moment, around half of the country's deceased are cremated. Likewise, roughly 15 percent of Germans are obese, and the figures are climbing.

The funeral industry has adapted to these new conditions with plus-size coffins and crematorium furnaces outfitted with larger doors. But one

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problem remains: Due to their high fat content, obese bodies often burn so hot that they overtax crematorium facilities. The cause of the chimney fire in Hamelin appears to have been "extreme heat due to burning a high amount of fat," according to Carl Schmidt, the crematorium's manager.

No Reliable Figures

No one knows exactly how often such things happen. But especially heavy bodies have long been considered one of the causes of spikes in pollution levels found during periodic inspections of crematorium exhaust emissions. The Bavarian Environment Agency has determined that crematoriums often exceed the permitted average level of carbon-monoxide emissions at the point when a wooden coffin collapses and the body inside ignites. In September 2009, for example, a 150-kilogram (330-pound) corpse overtaxed the crematorium in the southern German town of Kempten. The chimney grew so hot that it glowed and parts of its piping melted. The fire department arrived and tackled the chimney blaze with a powder extinguishing agent.

"Unforeseen fires happen at many crematoriums," says Jochen Sembdner, who constructs such facilities and conducts safety checks on them in the state of Lower Saxony. In such emergency situations, flaps behind the furnace open and the system goes into what's known as bypass mode. The furnace releases smoke -- together with all its dioxins and furans, mercury from dental fillings and other heavy metals and particulate matter -- directly into the outside air, bypassing the facility's gauges and filters. Crematorium operators say that the bypass mode is only used once or twice a year at any given crematorium. But that's not something that authorities check on.

This is an industry subject to tough competition, and the number of crematoriums in Germany is growing rapidly. In 2000, there were only around 100 public facilities. Today, there are 159 crematoriums -- around one-third of which are privately operated -- and more are in the planning stages. This increase comes despite the fact that there are already enough crematoriums to meet demand, according to Aeternitas, a consumer initiative that represents grieving families. This competition has caused cremation prices to drop to around €300 (\$390). Only in southern Germany do investors see potential for further growth. Here, though, they have to face citizens' initiatives that use the issue of overweight corpses in arguing their cases.

A Dangerous Business

Engineer Hubert Kerber is spearheading the protest against a new crematorium in Sinsheim-Reihen, a town in the southwestern German state of Baden-Württemberg. Kerber says facilities in bypass mode "spew pollutants." As an inspector with TÜV, a German safety-certification and technical inspection organization, Kerber has a chance to see many types of incinerators, including crematoriums. Having compared standards and maximum permissible limits, he believes that "every waste-incineration operation is more strictly regulated."

Firefighters responding to a fire at a crematorium in Hamburg in January 2008 even had to don protective breathing masks. The cremation of the body of an overweight man had led to a deflagration. The bypass flaps jammed and exhaust was unable to escape through the chimney. As a result, brownish smoke billowed through the building and the firefighters' instruments showed high levels of toxic carbon monoxide. The defective bypass valve was replaced immediately and the entire furnace system renovated, says the facility's manager.

To avoid spikes in pollution levels, a study by the Bavarian Environment Agency recommends placing coffins of particularly heavy corpses into the furnace "with the lid slightly open" and introducing "weight limits specific to each facility." This second point is to be introduced into the industry's guidelines this year with the goal of having manufacturers set weight limits for bodies that can be cremated in their furnaces.

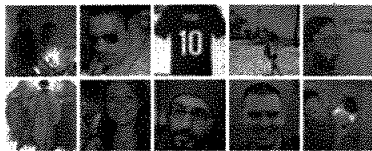
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However, that still leaves the issue of what will be done with the bodies of those exceeding such weight limits. Indeed, such measures could force people to scramble around in hearses in search of suitable cremation facilities. In France, for example, several crematoriums refused to accept the body of a 140-kilogram woman. The woman's daughter then wrote to the newspaper *Le Parisien* complaining of post-mortem discrimination against her mother.

Translated from the German by Ella Ornstein

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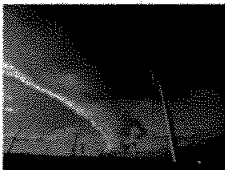
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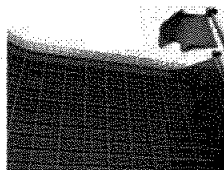
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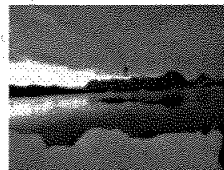
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Story by: Larry Warren
news@abc4.com

A dead man had one final earthly act before moving on.

Fire officials said the six-hundred pound man was in being cremated when his body fluids were too much for the oven. The body fluids seeped out onto the floor and ignited causing a fire at the Garner Funeral Home in Salt Lake City.

"Those fluids can be very flammable," said Scott Freitag of the Salt Lake City fire department. "Sort of like a grease fire."

An employee used an extinguisher to put out the fire.

The room is self-contained and has its own drainage system.

"There really is no risk or a hazard of it getting into the sewer system, the water system or into the general public," said Freitag.

Firefighters rarely see these kind of fires.

But they say a six-hundred-pound body can create problems during a cremation.

"It really does condense or breaks down that fat into a greasy product, just like a grease fire," said Freitag. "Only a little bit can cause a flame to go up."

The crematorium is back in business and the funeral director said they'll notify the family to assure them their loved one wasn't harmed.

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