

Dental fillings mean dearer cremations

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Consumer Reporter

THE cost of cremating your loved ones is about to rise – and it's all down to dental fillings.

Mercury found in dentists' handiwork accumulates in the air when burnt and can harm the brain, kidneys and nervous systems as well as affecting unborn babies.

Latest research from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has revealed 16 per cent of mercury emissions in the UK are from crematoria.

Council chiefs across the county have until the end of the year to come up with plans to reduce these emissions.

Government guidance calls on them to introduce new flue cleaning measures to help achieve a statutory target of a 50 per cent reduction by 2012.

One of the first authorities to consider increasing the cost of cremations to pay for installing new specialist equipment is Harrogate.

Council chiefs meet tomorrow to rubber-stamp a ten per cent rise over the next three years, over and above the normal five per cent annual rise.

From 2006/07 cremations at Stonefall Cemetery in the town will cost £437, rising by 2008/09 to £578 .

Councillor Pat Jones, executive board member with responsibility for the cremation service, acknowledged that any work carried out would be disruptive and distressing for families.

"This is another Government instruction to spend local taxpayers' money in order to comply with new legislation but with no increase in Government grant. In order for us to finance the cost of achieving mercury abatement, we will be considering phasing increases over the next few years."

Coun Jones said the extra income generated from a rise in the cost of cremations would be set aside to finance the work.

"The installing of abatement equipment at Stonefall is the safest way forward in improving Harrogate's environment and well-being and helping us meet our legal obligations."

Leeds City Council chiefs are currently considering how best to fund upgrades of crematoria to meet Government guidelines.

Denise Preston, chief recreation officer responsible for crematoriums, said: "It is expected to cost the council around £1.3 million to upgrade our crematoriums to meet the targets for mercury emissions set for 2012 and we are currently considering how this will be funded."

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