

# Natural Organic Reduction – Q&A

## Simple policy for a natural legacy (HF 2669 / SF 3134)

**What does this legislation do?** HF 2669 / SF 3143 add natural organic reduction (NOR) as another choice for Minnesotans after death, providing a sustainable alternative to cremation and burial. It gives us one more option in our right to choose our own method of disposition.

**What is natural organic reduction and how does it work?** NOR gently transforms human remains into compost in 4-6 weeks. The process lays the body into a large vessel along with natural materials such as straw and woodchips. The composting process creates heat of over 131F, which kills viruses, bacteria, and pathogens. The result exceeds EPA requirements for heavy metals, which are stabilized in the compost, not volatilized. The resulting compost is safe for gardens, trees, and general land use.

**What are the benefits of NOR?** As an alternative to cremation and conventional burial, the primary benefit of NOR is the ability to offer consumers additional choice regarding end-of-life options. The conversion of the body to its basic elements through a natural process also presents a unique opportunity to safely return remains to the earth. Using 1/8 the energy of cremation and saving over a metric ton of CO2 per person, NOR presents significant savings in carbon emissions, energy and land use, and addresses the growing demand for more sustainable alternatives.

**Is it safe?** Yes. The process kills bacteria and viruses, including COVID-19. Providers in Washington and Colorado have provided the service to hundreds of decedents safely since legalization in 2019 and 2021 respectively.

**Does it smell?** The NOR process does not smell. Microorganisms present in the aerobic process break down odorous gases into water and carbon dioxide. In addition, biofilters and mechanical ventilation are used to aerate the process and ensure that no trace of odor is emitted.

**Has it been tested and scientifically proven?** Research has proven the process is safe and effective. In 2018, Recompose sponsored a research project with Washington State University's (WSU) Soil Science Department to prove that NOR is a safe and effective means of disposition for humans. Six people donated their body in service to the study and were composted in three separate trials during a five month study. The materials met standards for heating, reaching a temperature over 131° for over 72 hours, which kills viruses, bacteria and pathogens. The final material was unrecognizable visually, chemically, or microbiologically as human remains.

**What happens to heavy metals like mercury?** NOR helps to ensure that mercury remains stabilized in the compost, rather than being volatilized (volatilized mercury from cremation is released into the atmosphere). Research completed by WSU showed that heavy metals, including arsenic, cadmium, copper, zinc, lead, and mercury, were all well under EPA limits.

**What happens to pharmaceuticals?** NOR breaks down many of the pharmaceuticals that do remain in the body after death. Research completed by WSU showed a 95% reduction of tracked pharmaceuticals.

# Natural Organic Reduction – Q&A

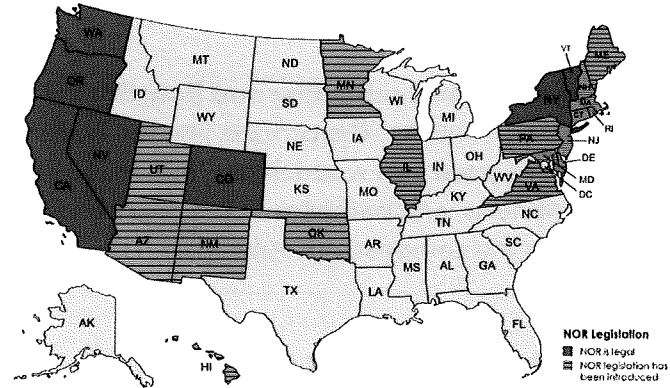
Simple policy for a natural legacy (HF 2669 / SF 3134)

## Is there a demand for NOR?

Yes, 64% of Americans have expressed an interest in green burial, indicating a need for sustainable and affordable alternatives. NOR is now legal in 7 states with legislation being proposed in several more.

Recompose, the first company to offer NOR since Washington's legalization in 2019 has provided this service to 375 individuals and has an active list of pre-paid members of over 1,600.

## Where has NOR been legalized - or - legislation proposed?



**Is there a demand for NOR in MN?** We have seen a growing interest in NOR in Minnesota with over 195 individuals signing up of the NOR Minnesota Action Group. Washington NOR providers have had over 200 individuals demonstrate interest in their services by joining their respective mailing lists.

Two Minnesotans have worked with a local funeral home to send their bodies to Washington provider Return Home in order to access NOR. Steve Wheeler, who passed September 12th, 2023 and chose NOR for his body disposition method was recently highlighted in the Star Tribune and shared his personal story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD1gLL05Npl>

---

***“With this act I can say I have left the world just a little bit better than when I found it.”***

- Steve Wheeler, Lake Elmo Resident who chose NOR as is final disposition method

---

**What is done with the compost?** Much like cremated remains, families have the opportunity to choose the best resting place for the compost created through this process. They might choose to plant a tree or support a thriving garden. All current providers in Washington present the option to donate the compost to conservation partners working on environmental restoration.

**What is the impact to the existing funeral profession?** Minnesota's funeral professionals will have the ability to offer NOR as desired. With growing interest in sustainable alternatives, this provides opportunity for existing businesses to expand offerings and join the wave of the future.