

Dozens buried on New York's Hart Island as coronavirus deaths surge



New York, April 10 (RHC)-- New York City officials have hired contract laborers to help bury the dead in its potter's field on Hart Island as the city's daily death rate from the coronavirus epidemic has reached grim new records in each of the last three days.

Drone pictures show bodies being buried on New York's Hart Island, where the department of corrections is dealing with more burials overall, amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has killed more than 5,000 people in New York City alone.

The city has used Hart Island to bury New Yorkers with no known next of kin or whose family are unable to arrange a funeral since the 19th century. Typically, some 25 bodies are interred each week by low-paid jail inmates working on the island, which sits off the east shore of the city's Bronx borough and is accessible only by boat. That number began increasing in March as the new coronavirus spread rapidly, making New York the epicentre of the global pandemic.

There are about two dozen bodies a day, five days a week buried on the island, said Jason Kersten, a spokesman for the New York City Department of Correction, which oversees the burials.

Before burial, the dead are wrapped in body bags and placed inside pine caskets. The deceased's name is scrawled in large letters on each casket, which helps should a body need to be disinterred later. They are buried in long narrow trenches excavated by digging machines.

"They added two new trenches in case we need them," Kersten said. To help with the surge, and amid an outbreak of the COVID-19 respiratory illness caused by the virus at the city's main jail, contract laborers have been hired, he said.

"For social distancing and safety reasons, city-sentenced people in custody are not assisting in burials for the duration of the pandemic," Kersten said.

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