

Cemeteries in Rome overflowing with coffins due to backlog in funerals

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Rome, April 16 (RHC)-- Rome's cemeteries are running out of space to store coffins ahead of funerals as a back-log in services due to COVID-19 restrictions has slowed down the pace for burials. In a video

obtained by Reuters on Friday, large refrigerated containers that cemetery workers said were holding dead bodies were seen outside the Prima Porta cemetery in the capital.

These types of containers are usually only inside cemeteries, but with cemeteries around the city at full capacity, the surplus bodies are in the containers outside, cemetery workers said. As frustration grows over the lack of space to bury the dead, funeral home workers held a demonstration, laying funeral wreaths next to a Roman temple in the capital, with the words "We are sorry" written across them.

"It cannot be possible that cemeteries do not receive the dead and that every few days we receive (from the cemeteries) the news that they are blocked, saying that the cemetery needs to be blocked because they do not have any more room to host the dead," explained secretary of the Italian federation of funeral workers, Giovanni Caciolli, at the demonstration. "But where should you put the dead, if not in a cemetery?" he asked.

A vintage hearse was parked by the temple, covered with banners reading "We are sorry but they do not allow us to bury your loved ones." Caciolli said the reason the cemeteries were so full was because in Rome, if a dead body is to be cremated, it must wait for 40 days for authorization from authorities, during which time the cemeteries keep the bodies in refrigerated containers.

Italy is still battling the pandemic and has registered over 115,000 deaths, with around 400 people dying of coronavirus every day. AMA, the agency that manages cemeteries in Rome, released a statement on Monday (April 12) saying "there are and will continue to be an adequate number of spaces available for new burials."

The AMA statement said from October 2020 to March 2021, 4,763 more deaths were recorded than in the same months of the two-year period 2019/2020 — an increase of 30 percent.

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