

# The Washington Post

## Va funeral home accused of atrocious conditions

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The Associated Press  
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WASHINGTON -- A funeral home that helps handle veterans awaiting burial at Arlington National Cemetery left corpses in an unrefrigerated garage, hallways and on makeshift gurneys, according to a former embalmer who has given his photographs and notes to authorities, The Washington Post reported Sunday.

"It was disturbing and disrespectful and unethical," said Steven Napper, a retired Maryland trooper who worked at the funeral home for nine months. "I never could have imagined what I saw there or the things we were asked to do."

Napper said he saw as many as 200 corpses not properly cared for while working at National Funeral Home in Falls Church, Va., from May until he quit in February. National Funeral Home also embalms and stores bodies for four other funeral homes in the D.C. region that are all part of Houston-based Service Corporation International, the world's largest funeral services conglomerate.

The Post reported that Napper's documentation as well as the observations of three other employees and a grieving son have sparked an investigation by the Virginia Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. The newspaper also reported that several people said a board investigator had interviewed them in recent weeks.

Lisa Hahn, the board's executive director, told the Post she could not confirm a current probe or talk about allegations.

Service Corporation International's Virginia Funeral Services is investigating the allegations, but has found its facilities comply with laws and regulations, company president J. Scott Young said in a statement. No employee brought any such conditions to the company's attention, he said.

"Our company is committed to treating all human remains with the utmost dignity and respect at all times," he said.

Photos in a video on the Post Web site show several coffins stacked on a rack in what Napper said was an unrefrigerated garage. Another photo shows a body wrapped in a white sheet on top of a cardboard box.

A message left by The Associated Press for Napper at a listed home number was not immediately returned Sunday.

In 2003, Service Corporation International reached a \$100 million settlement with hundreds of families over allegations involving two Florida cemeteries, including digging up graves and burying people in the wrong places.

Ronald Federici saw a lukewarm cooler overflowing with exposed bodies when his Army colonel father's body was taken to National in December.

"The stench was disgusting," Federici of Clifton, Va., told The Associated Press Sunday. He described seeing about 1 to 2 inches of feces and urine on the floor.

Federici immediately reported his observations to officials at Alexandria's Demaine Funeral Home, which was to handle his father's embalming. They told him it was a misunderstanding. He later took his complaints to the state and in a Jan. 2 letter, National Funeral Home's general manager told Virginia officials that the conditions Federici spoke of didn't exist.

Federici said he'd like to see the company be fined or shut down, "because obviously they didn't learn from the \$100 million settlement a few years ago."

"They need to make a public statement and make public reparation for this kind of egregious and vile behavior," he said.

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