

Grave subsidence – Why do graves sink?

Grave subsidence refers to the appearance of graves “sinking”. This is an entirely natural process caused by loosened soil settling into place and the natural process of the coffin collapsing over time.

Whilst the sinkage of the surface of a grave can cause distress to the bereaved, it is a “natural” phenomenon that affects all cemeteries.

Grave subsidence is a process that the Town of Essex manages and rectifies when necessary, and should not be cause for concern.

Topping up subsided graves

The Town of Essex conducts regular checks of recently backfilled graves, as well as monitoring graves after periods of rainfalls. After identifying which graves need top-ups, staff will schedule time to carry out these works.

What causes grave subsidence?

When graves are initially dug, the dirt removed is lumpy and irregular, particularly when it is high clay content. In a cemetery setting, we do not compact the backfilled material to exclude air spaces. Over time, the soil on a backfilled grave will appear to “sink”, although this is just the process of the air escaping and loosened dirt settling into place. The amount and rate of sinkage will depend on a range of factors, such as:

- Soil type
- Grave location
- Depth of grave(s)
- Number of burials
- Amount of rainfall
- Groundwater levels
- No vault

Heavy and prolonged rainfall in particular will contribute to grave subsidence.

What to do if you notice grave subsidence?

We recognise that seeing the surface of a grave sinking can cause distress to the bereaved, it is unfortunately a “natural” phenomenon that affects all cemeteries.

The Town of Essex performs routine maintenance to top-up graves, weather permitting. To assist in this process, please take note of the grave’s location and other details such as the name on the memorial or area of the cemetery so that we can locate the grave on our system.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT THE BEREAVEMENT AUTHORITY OF ONTARIO
www.thebao.ca or 647.483.2645 or info@thebao.ca