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know exists." North America, how we typically deal with bodies after death is atrocious for the

environment. With traditional casketed burial, first the body is embalmed. "You're exposing the dead

leak into the earth over time," Nelson says. gallons of embalming fluid each year, and approximately 827,060 gallons of that is

resources, including concrete, steel, copper, bronze and hardwoods. Even more common than burials these days is fire cremation, which involves "burning fossil fuels and just using a ton of energy," Nelson says. She estimates that in terms of energy, a single fire cremation is "the equivalent of driving about 600 miles in a standard

passenger vehicle." Plus, "if you have mercury dental fillings or any other toxins, that's

environment but still affordable. "The funeral industry is really slow to adapt and adopt

change," Nelson notes. "Consumers are more ready for these green options than the

Nelson is now the founder and CEO of Be a Tree Cremation, which opened its doors in

For some time now, consumers have been seeking options that are easier on the

just going up in smoke and into the atmosphere."

industry is."

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January 2021. The Denver, Colorado, company offers water cremation. Also known as aquamation or alkaline hydrolysis, water cremation has been around for more than a century. The process was patented in 1888, though initially it was used only for animal remains. It wasn't until the last decade or so that some funeral homes in North America began making it available.

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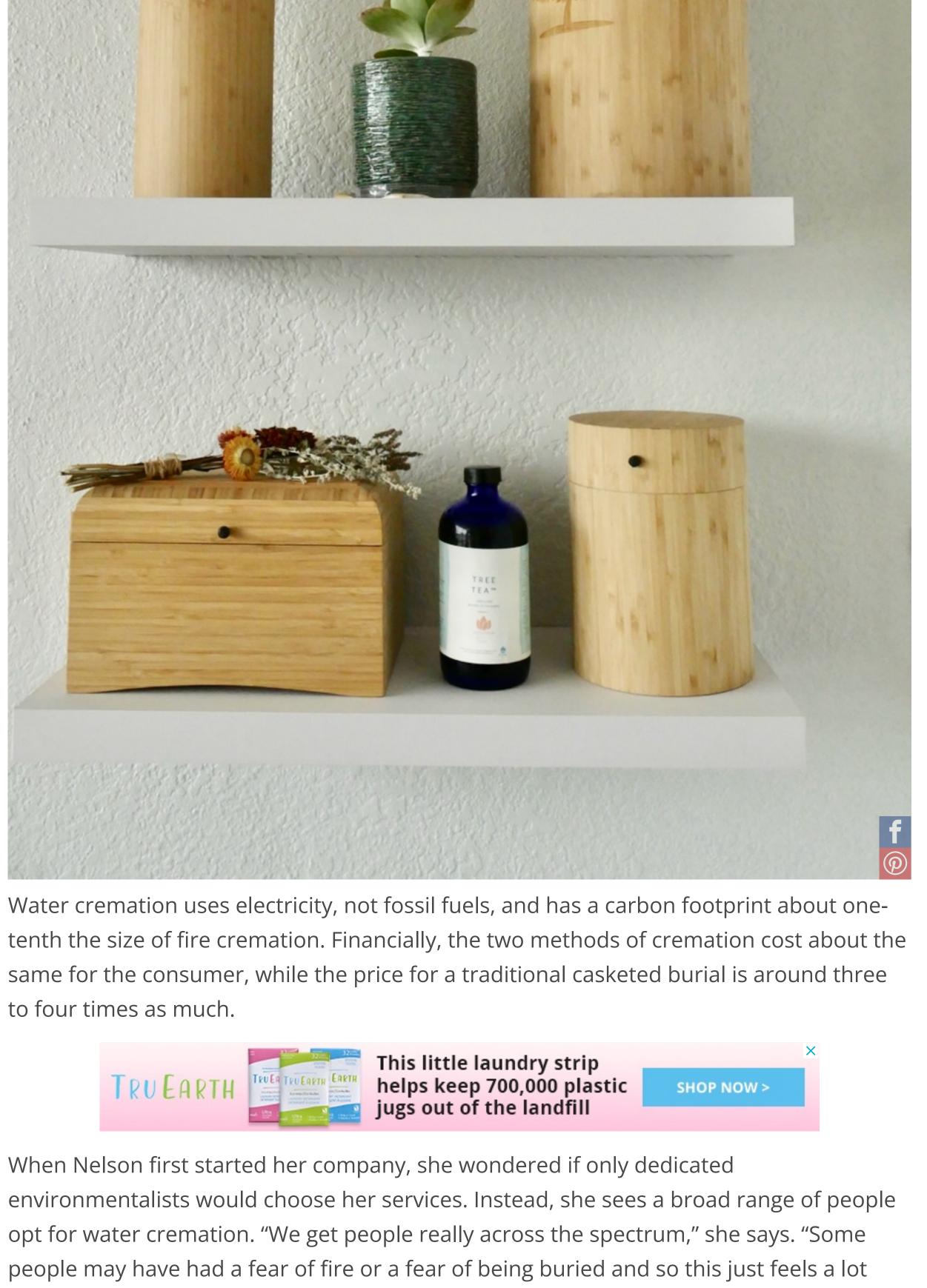
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decomposition" Nelson explains. "And at the end, we're left with skeletal remains and we're left with water. Skeletal remains dry and then get processed for the urn." As for the water, it's full of nutrients. "We actually return that back to the Earth, and it nourishes a local farm."

"Instead of fire, we use water and a little bit of alkali, which is the same thing used to

several hours, really breaking everything down in a way that mimics natural

make soaps and many other common household goods, and that gently circulates over



because we had politicians who are willing to sponsor that and advocate for that and get it passed." Nelson believes that people are finally becoming more willing to contemplate death. "I do think that the pandemic and the awareness around what's going on in our environment is increasing awareness of death," she says. And she commends the younger generation for their willingness to discuss difficult issues such as mental health and death. "I just really honour them for being able to talk about these taboo topics."

A child psychologist who specializes in helping children cope with grief and loss, she is

also a death doula and a hospice volunteer. After recovering from cancer and learning

McClatchey works for Keefe Funeral Home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, helping her

reduce the environmental impact of each choice. "Like skipping embalming, using the

container that's provided, selecting a crematory that has advanced filtration systems that

tend to have less emissions, things like that, all the way through home preparation," she

For far too many people, the subject of death is taboo. "There's this notion: If you think

about it, it will happen. Or if you plan for it, it will happen," McClatchey says. "We like to

say death is like pregnancy or sex. Talking about sex isn't going to make you pregnant.

Talking about death isn't going to kill you. But I think people are just incredibly reluctant

She advises anyone who cares about the environmental impact of their death to have the

Eco-friendly options will become the norm in her industry, McClatchey predicts. "Green is

not new. Green has been around forever. And a return back to the traditional way of

"Profit, unfortunately, drives a lot of what has happened in the funeral industry. But I

apprised of consumer trends and consumer choices and willing to support and engage

think the funeral players who are going to survive are going to be the ones who are

doing things, I think, is a natural progression," she says.

says. "Basically, the whole gamut." If green options aren't available in a client's region, she

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clients understand the full range of options available along with the various ways to

about green burials, she added another job title to her extensive resume: Green Funeral

cremation, then more recently with natural organic reduction or human composting, was

gentler for them, and just feels better." She adds, "That idea of living on through nature is

huge for people as well, which is connected to the environmental impact, though it's kind

Water cremation isn't the only eco-friendly alternative to fire cremation or a traditional

burial, organic reduction or human composting. The human remains are wrapped in a

biodegradable shroud and placed directly in the ground, with no embalming involved.

Many parts of the United States and Canada still do not offer green death options. "If

representative and telling them that you want these green options available," Nelson

someone lives in a state where it's not yet legal, I recommend writing to your state

advises. "That's how we've been able to make change here in Colorado with water

casketed burial. Companies such as Recompose offer green burial, also known as natural

can help calculate the carbon footprint of transporting human remains to an area with water cremation or natural burial.

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to face their own mortality."

their arrangements."

Steward.

Planning for death

Emily McClatchey talks about death—a lot.

of a different motive."

"I approach it much as I do clinical psychology. There's no judgment or belief about what one should do. It's all about following what the client would like to do or what they're interested in," she explains.

hard conversations now and also to make plans with a trusted funeral home. "If you want a greener death, you have to be intentional about it because, for very practical reasons, you're not going to be using embalming, so you don't have a lot of time for preservation of the body," she says. "I think pre-planning is a really good idea for people who are a little bit concerned that maybe their wishes would not be granted by somebody making

those consumers in a meaningful way." Further reading A community of funeral industry professionals, academics and artists created The Order of the Good Death, which has the goal of "building a meaningful, eco-friendly and equitable end of life." This death-positive website is filled with information—some practical, some simply fascinating—about green funerals, eco-friendly death technology, dealing with anxiety surrounding death, how to talk about death and more.

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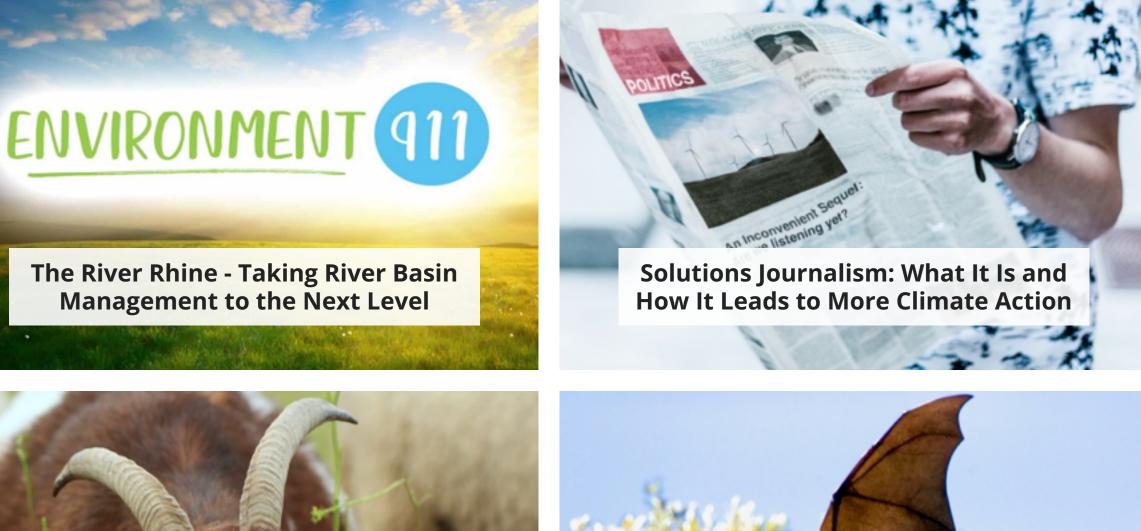
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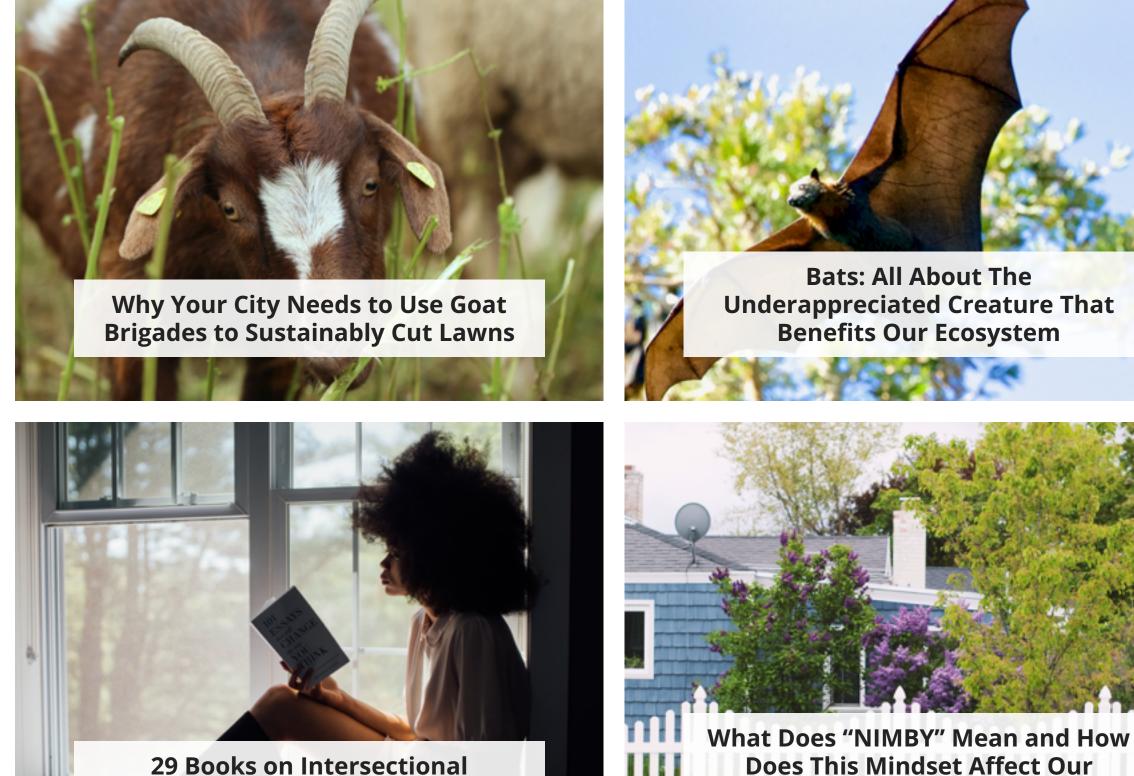
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