LIVINGSTON PARISH

Flooding prompts new burial regulations

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Burials in Livingston Parish cemeteries will take on a different look after the Parish Council banned surface-level vaults.

The new regulations, adopted Thursday, require burial vaults to be covered by at least 18 inches of soil. State law already required caskets to be buried beneath at least 2 feet of soil but made an exception for vaults.

The new parish rules arise in response to the August flood, which damaged hundreds of gravesites throughout the state. Officials are still working to identify and reinstate numerous caskets and remains.

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March 30, 2017
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Burial vaults appear to have borne the brunt of the damage as floodwaters seeped through the vaults’ sun-damaged lids and邀请 the caskets inside, popping the top off the caskets and allowing some of the bodies to float away.

The regulations are meant to limit the damage done by future floods, as well as make it easier to identify and retrieve displaced caskets in their rightful place.

The ordinance adds two more pieces of information to the list of identifying data required to permanently affix to caskets: the cemetery and burial plot location. The name and date of death of the deceased, as well as the funeral home’s name, already were required by state law to be affixed to caskets.

Councilman Jeff Hewlett, who cast the lone vote against the ordinance, questioned whether the new burial depth for vaults was feasible in areas like the southern part of the parish.

“Down where I live, it’s a very low-lying area, you dig down a foot, a foot and a half, you’re going to hit water,” said Hewlett, a French Settlement resident. “What are we going to do in that situation?”

Councilman Shane Mack, who chairs the ordinance committee that drafted the regulations, said he believes the ordinance is needed. He noted that some corporations, such as the one that runs a local cemetery, did not put vaults in place in areas that were not deep enough.

Livingston Parish burials had been allowed to be 24 inches deep, but Mack said it was a problem.

“Somebody said it was 24 inches, but we didn’t have any kind of law covered,” Mack said. “I’m thinking we’re already offending by that law, and if it was 24 inches, it should’ve been brought up before.”

Continuing to place vaults at or above ground level would put them at risk of continually failing off or flooding during floods, Councilman Maurice “Scooter” Reams said. It also exposes them to greater risk of damage.

“Typically, they get vaults at or above ground level because people like the look of it,” Councilman Charles “Black” Grubbs said. “But in reality, it doesn’t work well at all.”

The new ordinance applies to all new burials in Livingston Parish cemeteries. Violations of the ordinance will be punishable by a fine of $500.