

Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries

Position Paper

The Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries has created several position papers to convey their opinion of best practices on various topics related to historic cemeteries.

Unstable Markers and Other Features

August 2012

Recent reports of injuries, and sadly, the death of a four year old child, have prompted the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries to issue this position paper in an effort to help avoid similar incidents in Oregon.

Many people have no idea of just how heavy and fragile cemetery markers and other features can be. This is especially true for children who see these items as something on which to push, walk, or climb. Adults accompanying children need to be alert and keep children close by them and away from markers and other cemetery features such as curbing, bollards, decorative urns, etc.

Everyone must use extreme caution when on cemetery grounds and avoid touching, leaning, sitting on, or standing near markers. Just how heavy are these markers? Marble markers are about 160 pounds per cubic foot. Granite markers are about 200 pounds per cubic foot. A typical 1880s marble tablet marker might weigh as much as 200 pounds. A large granite block monument could weigh half a ton.

While the responsibility of maintaining headstones remains with the families of the deceased, many gravesites date back to the 1800's, with no family members surviving or available to care for them.

We strongly suggest that cemetery owners, volunteer groups and organizations that care for our cemeteries consider doing the following to protect the markers, cemetery workers, volunteers and visitors:

- Post notice at all entrances to the cemetery warning people to use caution when walking through the cemetery grounds and to avoid contact with the markers and other cemetery features or structures. Request that adults supervising children keep them away from all markers and other cemetery features and structures.
- Conduct an inventory of your cemetery to determine which markers and other cemetery features are at risk of falling. Check those monuments that may have a decorative feature on them such as a finial, urn, ball or other item that may be loose and in danger of falling.
- Attempt to contact the next of kin and advise them of the situation and request that they make arrangements to have the necessary repairs made.
- Make the necessary repairs as soon as possible. If necessary, lay the marker safely on the ground until the repairs can be made. Decorative items should be tagged with the block and plot number and stored away from the gravesite until the marker can be repaired. This will prevent these pieces from disappearing from the site.



Restrict access to the area by using stakes and caution tape with a notice posted.

- If it is impossible to lay the marker down on the ground, consider using braces to secure the marker in place until permanent repairs can be made. Access to the area should be restricted by using stakes and caution tape with a notice posted.

- Cemetery personnel and volunteers should be aware of visitors and inform those who may be unaware of the risks involved with getting too close to the markers.

Note: Evaluation of the markers should be completed by knowledgeable individuals who know what to look for and in a safe manner. Handling and repairs of the markers must be accomplished by professionals or properly trained volunteers.

Summary

Hopefully, by taking the time to follow these few suggested procedures, your cemetery will be a safer place for cemetery workers, volunteers, and visitors. The Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries offers annual workshops on marker maintenance and repair and grants that fund training and repair.

For more information or help

Advice and help is available from Kuri Gill, Program Coordinator for OCHC, and the OCHC Commissioners. Contact them at Kuri.Gill@state.or.us or 503-986-0685.

