

# Ways to Protect an Historic Cemetery

More and more people are concerned about the condition of many of Oregon's historic cemeteries. They want to ensure that the cemeteries are respected and preserved. Although there is no statewide organization that directly cares for cemeteries, individuals and organizations can help by implementing some of the following tactics.



1. List the cemetery with the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries (OCHC). The list and survey form are available at [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or by calling (503) 986-0685.
  - a. Provides knowledge of the cemetery's existence.
  - b. Offers potential payment for repairs in a vandalism conviction.
  - c. Requires Commission knowledge and comment before cemetery or burials can be removed.
2. Dedicate the land for purpose as a cemetery. Check county records to see if the land is already dedicated. If it is not, the property owner should write a letter stating the dedication and include a map to show the borders of the dedication. To remove dedication of land as a cemetery, the property owners must go through a public process. (ORS 97.440)
  - a. Provides knowledge of the land's purpose as a cemetery.
  - b. Creates a public notification process to change land use.
  - c. Provides knowledge to county planners that the land is specified as a cemetery.
3. List the historic cemetery on city and county historic landmark lists. Check with your local governments to find out how to do this.
4. Know the local and state laws regarding historic cemeteries. For state laws visit [www.oregon.gov](http://www.oregon.gov). Some laws to consider are:
  - a. Historic cemetery laws [ORS 97](#)
  - b. Vandalism and abuse of a memorial to the dead [ORS 166.076](#)
  - c. Archaeological laws [ORS 358.905 to 358.955](#) and [ORS 390.235 to 390.240](#)
5. List the cemetery on the National Register of Historic Places. This can be difficult for cemeteries, so it is often better to list with a related historic structure or historic district. A formal listing provides source of pride for the community and a way to spread the word about the location's historical significance. A National Register nomination requires a significant amount of time and money. For information on the National Register of Historic Places visit [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or call (503) 986-0690.

To view or add to the State Historic Cemeteries list visit [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or call (503) 986-0685.



**Oregon Heritage**  
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6. Keep it clean. Pick up trash and keep plant life away from markers. When people see the cemetery is cared for, there is more interest in visiting and less interest in vandalism.



7. Put up signs. From simple name to more detailed plot maps, signs help people see the value of the place.
8. Post rules and contact information at the cemetery. People are interested in helping. Contact information can be listed with the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries and the OCHC number can be listed on the sign if volunteers are concerned about leaving personal information at the cemetery.
9. Use methods of cleaning, maintenance and repair that preserve the cemetery's historic features including markers, fences, plants, etc. Visit [www.oregonheritage.org](http://www.oregonheritage.org) or call (503) 986-0685 for details.
10. Offer a short presentation to the City Council, City Historical or Landmarks Commissions or Advisory Boards and County Commission and Advisory Boards.
11. Encourage the public to participate. Personal experience with a place creates commitment. Ways you can encourage participation are:

- a. Announce clean-up days in the local paper.
- b. Connect with local volunteer groups (clean up, Memorial Day flags, Memorial Day hosts, etc) such as Scouts, Rotary, Lions, Elks, Masons, 20/30, Chamber of Commerce, schools, Key Club, Honor Society, etc.
- c. Hold educational events such as historical tours, heritage plant tours, living history presentations, bird watching sessions, Halloween events, etc.



12. Tell the world...whenever there is a clean up, special project or new historical discovery share it. The more people know, the more support the place will have. Write articles, press releases and letters to the editor. Send emails and letters to city councils, county commissioners and other officials.

For more information about the Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries and historic cemetery resources contact:

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