

Dozens of decaying corpses found piled in unrefrigerated trucks at New York City funeral home

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In a gruesome example of how the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated New York City, authorities reported the discovery on Wednesday of dozens of decomposing bodies stored in trucks outside of a funeral home in Flatlands, a working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Police were summoned to the scene in response to calls from nearby residents complaining of a horrible stench, with one caller reporting blood leaking from a truck. Upon arrival, they found two trucks stuffed with decomposing bodies. News reports quote residents saying that the sight of corpses on the sidewalk had become a common occurrence. The scene is reminiscent of ones reported in other countries.

It was not immediately determined whether these were all victims of COVID-19, but the staggering number of additional deaths due to the pandemic has overwhelmed existing mortuary facilities throughout the city.

To date, more than 18,000 residents have died from COVID-19, putting a huge strain on the normal methods for disposition of the dead—interment or cremation. Prior to the pandemic, New York City's normal death rate was approximately 150 per day. At its peak earlier this month, the rate had reached approximately 800.

The city has had to resort to emergency measures to deal with the immense numbers of corpses. These include the digging of mass graves on Hart Island, the city's pauper's cemetery for 150 years, where over a million people are already buried, and the stationing of refrigerated trucks at hospitals and funeral homes to temporarily store the deceased. The trucks at the Brooklyn funeral home were a tractor trailer and a U-

Haul, neither of which were refrigerated. Crematories are now allowed to operate 24 hours a day, and the city has explored the possibility of digging mass graves in public parks.

Mike Lanotte, the president of the New York Funeral Directors Association, said in an interview with CNBC, "There is definitely a lot of stress on the entire death care industry right now in New York City because of the death we've witnessed." As if to emphasize the gravity of the crisis, the *New York Post* report on Thursday, a day after the discovery in Brooklyn, that a funeral home in Queens is jammed with many dozens of bodies stored in caskets awaiting cremation. That facility has experienced a dramatic increase, from an average of seven or eight bodies a week to more than 20 a day.

The owner of the Brooklyn funeral home, Andrew T. Cleckley, reported that he and other funeral directors were overwhelmed by an unprecedented influx of bodies, and that he only resorted to using the trucks after his chapel was already filled with over 100 bodies and his freezer had stopped working.

Cleckley said that, due to the high demand, he was unable to obtain refrigerated vehicles. The location of the funeral home was not registered with the city's Department of Buildings as a funeral parlor, but as a venue for automobile sales and machinery manufacture. As a result of the discovery, the funeral home has been cited for violations by the city's Health Department, but no criminal charges have so far been brought.

Describing the situation as "unconscionable" and "absolutely unacceptable," New York City's Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio declared, "I have no idea in the world how any funeral home could let this

happen.” He claimed that a “substantial amount of refrigerated trucks [are] available.”

However, reports from across the country recount incidents of COVID-19 victims stacked in the hallways or utility closets of hospitals and nursing homes, including a case in Brooklyn where management had left 10 corpses in a room with living residents. It should be noted that the mistreatment of the working-class dead in a profit-driven funerary system is not a new phenomenon.

Whatever the immediate circumstances of the particular incident at the funeral home in Brooklyn may be, the fact of the matter is that this horrific episode is undoubtedly just the tip of the iceberg. The carnage that has overwhelmed New York City and the rest of the world is the inevitable result of decades of the dismantling of the health system in the city and across the globe and the criminal ineptitude and a policy of malign neglect by the ruling class, all with the aim of maximizing and prioritizing corporate profits, over the health and welfare of the working class.



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