



# CEMETERY OPERATIONS

*During extreme weather*

TOWNSVILLE  
CEMETERIES



# CEMETERY TEAM



## TOWNSVILLE CEMETERIES



The Townsville Cemeteries team consist of Seven (7) staff:

- Sharon Niere – Cemetery Records Officer
- David Welton – Team Leader Cemeteries
- Bradley O'Neill – Crew Leader Cemeteries
- Craig Barnsley – Grave Digger
- Shaun O'Keefe – Grave Digger
- Andrew Hensell – Grave Digger
- Brenton McIntosh - Labourer

### DISCLAIMER

*The information on these slides is for general information purposes only and do not constitute legal or other professional advice on any subject matter. Townsville City Council does not accept any responsibility for any loss which may arise from reliance on information contained in this presentation.*



# BELGIAN GARDENS CEMETERY

Townsville's most active cemetery

Established in November 1900  
with the first interment in 1902

46 HA (113 Acres) of land

Over 22,000 allocated plots with  
over 34,000 total interments

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# MONSOONAL EVENT FEBRUARY 2019

## TOWNSVILLE CEMETERIES



Over 1250mm of rainfall recorded

Dam reached 250% capacity – 1200m<sup>3</sup> a second of water released when gates were fully opened

3,300 homes fully inundated

8,500 homes flood affected

Roads, rail and airport closed





# WEATHER EXTREMES

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In the last 2 years Townsville has experienced

- Drought (dam under 10% capacity)
- Monsoonal rain causing widespread flooding



# CEMETERY CLOSURE

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Advice was sent out 31 January to announce the closure of Belgian Gardens Cemetery due to the weather event.

- Staff that were able to safely make it to work were re-deployed to other locations to assist with emergency preparation
- Council staff and volunteers collectively filled over 180,000 sand bags from over 8000T of sand which were distributed to residents by ADF, Council, SES and Community Groups





# IMPACT ON THE FUNERAL HOMES

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Local funeral homes ran out of cold storage

- Embalming was required for multiple bodies

Cemetery communication to stakeholder

- Appreciation from multiple organisations for the constant updates and efforts made to ensure the most desirable outcome was achieved for grieving families

Compliments acknowledging the effort to resume business as usual within the cemetery

- BAU was achieved earlier in comparison to the Night of Noah (rain event in 1998) where over 550mm of rain fell in a 24 hour period



# AFTER THE RAIN SUBSIDED

## TOWNSVILLE CEMETERIES



- The cemetery remained closed for 11 business days
- Burials re-commenced on Friday 15 February
- Maximum number of interments were reduced to two and it was recommended that funeral homes suggest “delivery only” to families requesting services to avoid additional distress regarding to water in the grave
- When rain stopped the cemetery water table remained very high for the following 3 months impacting all graves that were prepared
- The back log of funerals were cleared on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019



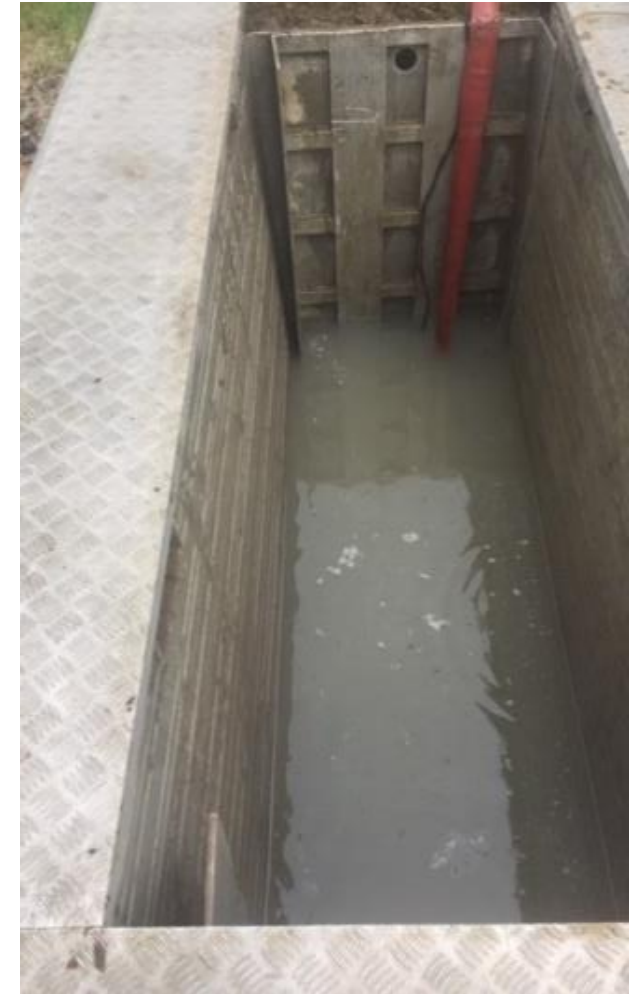


# AFTER THE RAIN SUBSIDED

## TOWNSVILLE CEMETERIES



- Procurement of a second pump  
Services required to have pump running during service
- Shoring installed in grave  
Already our practice – importance highlighted due to poor ground conditions
- Extra care taken for each set-up  
High water table and very poor ground conditions posed a risk to attendees. The cemetery team were very vigilant in their set-ups to ensure safety of the public was maintained



# LESSONS LEARNED

- Design of iron hooks to anchor coffin down  
Iron rods with hooked ends that goes through the coffin handles and keeps the coffin anchored to prevent rolling/movement when backfilling with a high water table
- Traditional backfilling with coffin sitting on cinderblocks  
Prevents the coffin rolling/ moving while the family complete the service and backfilling.
- Skills and experience of the cemetery team  
During and post this event the cemetery team exhibited high safety standards and excellent problem solving skills to ensure all reasonable requests were completed in a timely matter

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## THANK YOU

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The support from Townsville City Council Management and well wishes from ACCA and other Cemetery operators during this time was very much appreciated.