

City of Phoenix
Archaeology Section
Media Policy for Burial Discovery Situations

Archaeological investigations have determined that a prehistoric culture called the Hohokam buried their deceased relatives in cemeteries scattered throughout the City of Phoenix. Consequently, Hohokam burials are frequently discovered during construction and other ground disturbing activities.

The state of Arizona Antiquities Act (A.R.S. 41-844 and A.R.S. 41-865) and its implementing regulations requires that the treatment and removal of human remains be done in a respectful and sensitive manner. Native American communities in Arizona have stated that the public should not be allowed to view human remains during their excavation, and that no photographs or video film are allowed.

If the news media or curious bystanders appear at an archaeological site where human remains are being removed, they should be informed that human remains have been found and that they cannot observe or film the human remains.

In addition, in order to ensure that the human remains are not observed by anyone other than the archaeologists who are working at the site and by City or State officials, the area around the human remains must be secured with a fence and cloth be placed on the fence to prevent the public from viewing their removal. Any cloth placed on the burial itself must be muslin cloth. According to the Arizona Public Records Act (ARS 39-125), the City can refuse to provide information to the public about the location of human burials in order to protect them from vandalism.

All prehistoric human burials discovered within the City of Phoenix should be reported to the City Archaeology Office (602-495-0901). For more information about the State burial laws, contact the State Museum Burial Coordinator (520-621-4795). For more information about City projects, contact the City of Phoenix Public Information Office (602-262-7176).