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Necessity Is The Mother Of Invention.

## Hong Kong's COVID toll leads some to eco-friendlier coffins

BY ALICE FUNG AND JANICE LO  
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HONG KONG —



A worker assembles a cardboard coffin at the Hong Kong factory of LifeArt. Hong Kong is running short of traditional coffins, and the company makes versions that it says are environmentally friendly. (Kin Cheung / Associated Press)

Hong Kong's COVID-19 outbreak has cost about 6,000 lives this year — and the city is running out of coffins.

Authorities have scrambled to order more. The government said 1,200 coffins had reached the city

last week, with more to come.

Space constraints make cremation a common burial practice in the densely populated island territory off the Chinese mainland, and the coffins used typically are wood or wood substitutes. To cope with the shortage, some companies are offering alternatives, such as an environmentally friendly cardboard coffin.

LifeArt Asia has cardboard coffins made of recycled wood fiber that can be customized with designs on the exterior. Up to 50 can be produced a day in the company's factory in Aberdeen, a southern district of Hong Kong.

Chief Executive Wilson Tong said there is some resistance to using caskets made of cardboard. People feel that "it's a little bit shameful to use so-called paper caskets. They feel that this is not very respectful to their loved ones," Tong said.

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Wilson Tong, CEO of LifeArt Asia, left, and an employee move a cardboard coffin at the factory in Hong Kong. (Kin Cheung / Associated Press)

But he noted that the company has designs that can reflect religion or hobbies, and the coffins can even have a personalized color.

“So it gives more than enough sufficient choices to the people, so that they can customize the funeral and offer a more pleasant farewell.”

The company says its cardboard coffins,

when burned during cremation, emit 87% less greenhouse gas than those made of wood or wood substitutes. Each LifeArt coffin weighs about 23 pounds (10.5 kilograms) and can carry a body that weighs up to 440 pounds (200 kilograms).

Hong Kong has averaged about 200 COVID-19 deaths per day over the past week; many of the victims were elderly residents who were not vaccinated. The surge has put a strain on mortuaries, and refrigerated containers are being used to temporarily store bodies.



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Amid the rising toll, the nonprofit Forget Thee Not, which advises people on their choices for last rites, bought 300 cardboard coffins to either send to hospitals or give to families who need them.



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“We have been promoting environmental-friendly and personalized funerals. Now we see that Hong Kong needs more coffins. There are not enough coffins for the bodies in our hospitals,” said Albert Ko, a board director at Forget Thee Not.

Ko said some of the elderly who discussed their last rites with the organization have been open to the idea of eco-coffins.

“We hope to take this opportunity to contribute as well as promote eco-coffins,” he said.

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