

Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

Guidance for the maintenance of historic cemeteries and recipients of the Neglected Cemetery Grant

The National Park Service has an excellent brief (#48) dedicated to the care of historic cemeteries for long term preservation. It can be found at this location:

<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/upload/preservation-brief-48-grave-markers.pdf>

SHPO recommends that all applicants take this guidance into consideration, but has distilled the following guidance based on the proposed activities:

Documentation of the existing conditions is always a good idea before embarking on any activities.

Repairs to Fences, Stonewalls, or other Historic Boundary Markers

1. In most instances, unmarked graves often extend beyond the marked boundaries of cemeteries that are more than 100 years old. For this reason, SHPO strongly recommends exercising extreme caution if the repairs entail adding new posts or include other ground disturbing activities.
2. Historic wood fences or stonewalls should be repaired with in-kind materials that match the existing configuration.

Debris Clearing:

1. Avoid removing debris during periods when the ground is saturated or any other time that renders the site prone to erosion, compaction, or disturbance from management activity. In other words, the ground should be dry or stable to reduce the possibility of rutting.
2. Only use rubber track or tire vehicles.
3. Cut trees in place. Do not grind or remove the tree stumps.
4. Identify avoidance areas around monuments or fencing with the contractor to avoid inadvertent impacts.

Mowing:

1. Avoid using large ride-on mowers, unless they have protective bumpers.
2. Hand mowers are preferred, especially in areas with fragile monuments or tight spaces
3. If riding over coping, or low flat markers cannot be avoided, raise the blade height in these areas.
4. Periodic maintenance mowing is highly encouraged.

Trimming/Edging:

1. Use the lightest trim line available, and keep it angled towards the ground to avoid chipping headstones.
2. Hand trim areas around very fragile stones or ornament.

Headstone/Monument Cleaning:

1. Use the least abrasive means possible.
2. Do NOT power wash.
3. Only clean when it is going to be above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 24 hours.
4. If the surface is sandy or sugary in appearance, do not attempt to clean because you will scrub off part of the stone.
5. Always test a cleaning method first to see the result and prevent overall damage.
6. Start by using natural bristle or nylon bristle brush and water. Allow to dry and assess the results (at least 48 hours) before moving on to a more aggressive method.
7. If water is too mild, try a PH neutral soap and water mixture with brush. Allow to dry and assess the results (at least 48 hours).
8. Never use acidic cleaners or bleach to clean stones. There are specific products to clean masonry that are best applied by a qualified conservator.

The following activities should be done under the supervision of a trained conservator:

1. Repointing
2. Resetting
3. Repairing