



Physical Anthropology Section – 2007

H88 Even in Alaska! Missing Person or Cremains and How to Tell the Difference

Kathleen Day, MS, State of Alaska Medical Examiner's Office, 4500 South Boniface Parkway, Anchorage, AK 99507; and David McMahan, MA, Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Office of History & Archaeology, 3601 C Street, Suite 1278, Anchorage, AK 99503*

After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about a model that can be used when unidentified burned bone fragments are found and that will assist scientists of various disciplines to recognize human cremains.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing a model that can be utilized by investigators when confronted with unidentified burned osteological fragments and by demonstrating how microscopic analysis and the cooperation of various professionals can aid in the analysis of various specimens in order to identify missing individuals and/or cremains.

New trends in the funeral industry are posing a challenge for forensic scientists. There is an increased interest in customized and non-traditional services, as well as a growing number of people choosing cremations over burials as their preferred form of body disposition. Careful collection and scene documentation is crucial whenever unidentified remains are found. The initial step in these cases will always entail attempting to determine animal vs. human bone. When fragments are very small, this may not be possible. If the fragments are human or if there are obvious artifacts such as teeth or clothing associated with the remains, the accepted protocol is then to attempt to match the remains with missing persons last known to be in the vicinity. All evidence and remains found at the scene need to be collected for further analysis. In this case study, the presenters will document the steps used to analyze small bone fragments, present visual representations of burning patterns in bones, and help forensic scientists determine cases involving foul play by burning versus standard cremation practices. The presentation will also include visual representations of cremation artifacts and the procedures utilized in the funeral industry during the cremation process. It will demonstrate how common cremation artifacts can be misidentified to the untrained eye and will include the most common type of items found when an individual is cremated and then their ashes scattered.

Cremains, Physical Anthropology, Forensic Odontology