NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING
Title 22, California Code of Regulations
Reduction Chamber Standards (DPH-24-012)
Notice Published September 18, 2026

Notice is hereby given that the California Department of Public Health (Department) is proposing the regulation described below. This notice of proposed rulemaking commences a rulemaking to make the regulations permanent after considering all comments, objections, and recommendations regarding the regulation.

PUBLIC PROCEEDINGS

The Department is conducting a 45-day written public proceeding during which time any interested person or such person's duly authorized representative may present statements, arguments or contentions (all of which are hereinafter referred to as comments) relevant to the action described in the Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview section of this notice.

To request copies of the regulatory proposal in an alternate format, please write or call: David Martin, Office of Regulations, 1415 L Street Suite 500, Sacramento, CA 95814, at (279) 217-0888, email to David.Martin@cdph.ca.gov or use the California Relay Service by dialing 711.

PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing has not been scheduled for this rulemaking. However, the Department will conduct a public hearing if a written request for a public hearing is received from any interested person, or his or her authorized representative, no later than 15 days prior to the close of the written comment period, pursuant to Government Code Section 11346.8.

ASSISTIVE SERVICES

For individuals with disabilities, the Department will provide assistive services such as conversion of written materials into Braille, large print, audio format, and computer disk. For public hearings, assistive services can include sign-language interpretation, real-time captioning, note takers, reading, or writing assistance. To request these assistive services, please call David Martin at (279) 217-0888 or (California Relay at 711 or 1-800-735-2929), or email Regulations@cdph.ca.gov or write to the Office of Regulations

at the address noted above. Note: The range of assistive services available may be limited if requests are received less than 10 business days prior to public hearing.

WRITTEN COMMENT PERIOD

Written comments pertaining to this proposal, regardless of the method of transmittal, must be received by Office of Regulations on November 5, 2026, which is hereby designated as the close of the written comment period. Comments received after this date will not be considered timely.

Written Comments must be submitted as follows:

1. By email to: Regulations@cdph.ca.gov. It is requested that email transmission of comments, particularly those with attachments, contain the regulation package identifier "DPH-24-012 Reduction Chamber Standards" in the subject line to facilitate timely identification and review of the comment.

2. By fax transmission to: (916) 636-6220.

3. By postal service or hand delivered to: California Department of Public Health, Office of Regulations, 1415 L Street, Suite 500, Sacramento, CA 95814.

All comments, including email or fax transmissions, should include the regulation package identifier, DPH-24-012 Reduction Chamber Standards, along with your name and your mailing address or email address in order for the Department to provide copies of any notices for proposed changes to the regulation text on which additional comments may be solicited.

AUTHORITY AND REFERENCE

Under CA Health and Safety Code sections 131200 and 131056, the Department has authority to adopt and enforce regulations for the execution of its duties. Under CA Business & Professions Code section 7714.3, the Department has the authority to adopt, and amend, rules and regulations prescribing the standards for reduction chambers to preserve the public health and safety and to ensure the destruction of pathogenic microorganisms.

References: Sections 7001, 7002.7, 7010.3, 7010.8, 7025, 8393, 8392, 8395, 107150, 114710, 114715, 114970, 114985, 117690, 120130 Health and Safety Code; Section 7714.3, Business and Professional Code.

INFORMATIVE DIGEST/POLICY STATEMENT OVERVIEW

Summary of Proposal:

The California Department of Public Health (Department) proposes to adopt rules and regulations concerning the sale and use of reduction chambers in the death-care industry. Assembly Bill (AB) 351 (Garcia, Chapter 399, Statutes of 2022) authorizes reduction as an additional disposition method, along with burial, cremation, and alkaline hydrolysis, and directs the Department to adopt rules and regulations prescribing standards for reduction chambers to preserve the public's health and safety and to ensure the destruction of pathogenic microorganisms. AB 351 also authorizes the Department to create an application process by which reduction chamber manufacturers may apply for sale and use of their reduction chambers in California. This proposal seeks to establish reduction chambers standards that will preserve public health and safety.

Background:

Reduction, also known as Natural Organic Reduction, was first authorized as a final disposition method in Washington State in 2019, and is defined in their regulations as “the contained, accelerated conversion of human remains to soil.” The process relies on aerobic microorganisms to decompose human remains in a chamber or vessel. Reduction requires an operator to add organic plant materials to feed the decomposing microorganisms as well as air and water to maintain aerobic decomposition.

As of September 2025, fourteen states have authorized reduction as a disposition option (Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont, California, New York, Nevada, Arizona, Maine, Delaware, Maryland, Minnesota, Georgia, and New Jersey). However, as of 2025, reduction is practiced only in Washington, Colorado, Oregon, and Nevada. Colorado providers operate without a comprehensive regulatory structure. Oregon’s regulations require operators to “…utilize an industry-specific vessel that meets industry and commercial standards for use as a reduction chamber…” but do not specify criteria for pathogen destruction or post-reduction testing parameters. Nevada operators rely primarily on statutes for guidance, and proposed regulations do not address chamber designs or functionality. Washington regulations provide guidance on vessel performance and confirmatory post-reduction testing for indicator pathogens and heavy metal pollutants. New York’s regulations are the most comprehensive regarding reduction operations, including vessel descriptions, organic plant materials required to achieve reduction, operating procedure, data logging, and confirmational testing.

There are no federal regulations pertaining directly to reduction and associated processes. The Department intends to adapt parts of the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s composting guidance, applicable neighboring state reduction program regulations, and to utilize scientific studies related to reduction to develop California’s reduction chamber program.

Problem Statement:

Section 26 of AB 351 authorizes reduction as a method for final disposition. However, no statutes or regulations exist prescribing standards for the safe and effective application of this method. Currently, only one commercial entity manufactures reduction chambers anywhere, either domestically or internationally. The new industry will require oversight to ensure safe and effective operations. Reduction is in its infancy and industry best practices have not been developed. Without regulations that prescribe minimum standards for reduction chambers, reduction would pose a risk to public health and safety. Reduction chambers could break during operation, creating a hazard for the operator. The operator may not be able to confirm the reduced remains are free of pathogens, risking exposure to anyone handling the remains. The reduction process may stop if improperly maintained, in which case the human remains would be incompletely reduced.

Objectives (Goals) of the Regulation:

The broad objective of this proposal is to effectuate the Department’s statutory mandate to prescribe standards for the preservation of public health and safety by adopting rules and regulations for the manufacture, sale, and use of reduction chambers.

Anticipated Benefits:
This proposal ensures that reduction chambers are manufactured and operated safely and effectively. Standards for reduction chamber construction preserve the dignity of the human remains. The prescribed requirements for monitoring the reduction process ensure reduced human remains are safe to handle.

AB 351 allows for the reduced human remains to be returned to the relatives and friends of the deceased person in soil form. However, unlike burial, where any pathogens are sequestered with the human remains, or cremation and alkaline hydrolysis, where high heat and pressure destroy pathogens, reduction carries a risk of pathogen exposure if conducted incorrectly. The regulations that are being proposed reduce pathogen exposure risks for reduction facility operators and recipients of the reduced remains.

Unlike cremation, which requires large quantities of fossil fuels to incinerate a human body and emits harmful greenhouse gases in the process, the energy required to achieve reduction is primarily produced by microbiological decomposers. By comparison, reduction uses only a fraction of supplementary or additional energy. The process results in a nutrient rich material, very similar to compost, that may be used as a soil amendment, directly benefiting the health of Californians and the environment.

Evaluation as to Whether the Proposed Regulations Are Inconsistent or Incompatible with Existing State and Federal Regulations:
The Department has determined that the proposed regulations are not inconsistent or incompatible with existing state regulations. After conducting a review for any regulations that would relate to or affect this area, the Department has concluded that these are the only regulations that concern the reduction chamber language.

Substantial Difference from Federal Regulation or Statute:
There are no Federal statutes or regulations pertaining to reduction or reduction chambers.

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE
None.

MANDATED BY FEDERAL LAW OR REGULATIONS
The Department determined these regulations are not identical to previously adopted or amended federal regulations.

OTHER STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS
The Department has determined there are no other statutory requirements.

LOCAL MANDATE
The Department has determined that the proposed regulations would not impose a mandate on local agencies or school districts, nor are there any costs for which reimbursement is required by Part 7 (commencing with section 17500) of Division 4 of the Government Code.

FISCAL IMPACT ESTIMATES
Cost to any local agencies or school districts that must be reimbursed pursuant to Section 17561 of Government Code:
The Department has determined that these regulations would not impose a mandate on

any local agencies or school districts.

The cost or savings to any state agency:
The Department does not anticipate any cost or savings to any state agency.

Other Nondiscretionary Cost or Savings Imposed on Local Agencies:
The Department does not anticipate any other nondiscretionary cost or savings imposed on local agencies.

Cost or Savings in Federal Funding to the State:
The Department has determined that the regulations will not affect federal funding.

HOUSING COSTS
The Department has determined that the proposed regulations will have no impact on housing costs. The regulations only affect potential reduction chamber manufacturers and operators.

SIGNIFICANT STATEWIDE ADVERSE ECONOMIC IMPACT DIRECTLY AFFECTING BUSINESS, INCLUDING ABILITY TO COMPETE
The Department has made the initial determination that the proposed regulations would not have a significant statewide adverse economic impact directly affecting businesses, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states.

STATEMENT OF THE RESULTS OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)
The Department has determined that the regulations affect the following as described:

A. The creation or elimination of jobs within the State of California.
The proposed regulations are not likely to create or eliminate significant numbers of jobs in the state. However, it is possible that new reduction chamber manufacturers and operators will determine additional workers are required to manufacture or operate reduction chambers.

B. The creation of new businesses or the elimination of existing businesses within the State of California.
The proposed regulations are not likely to create or eliminate significant numbers of businesses in the state. As of April 2025, only six businesses in the country operate reduction chambers. It is likely that a small number of businesses will be created in the state to meet the demands of the population.

C. The expansion of businesses currently doing business within the State of California.
The proposed regulations are not likely to significantly expand businesses currently operating in the state. Of the six reduction chamber operators mentioned above, only two of them represent businesses that expanded into reduction. The others are stand-alone operations that were built specifically to offer reduction services. It is likely that a small number of businesses currently operating in the state will expand into reduction to meet the demands of the population.

D. The benefits of the regulation to the health and welfare of California residents, worker safety, and the state's environment.

The proposed regulations will benefit the health and welfare of California's residents, worker safety, and the environment. The reduction chamber design and performance standards will ensure California's residents won't be exposed to pathogens or heavy metal pollutants. Requirements for safe operations will benefit worker safety and preserve the dignity of the human remains. The environment will benefit both directly and indirectly from the application of the nutrient-dense reduced human remains in a conservation area (HSC section 7054.5) and a drastic decrease in greenhouse gas generation where reduction is preferred over cremation.

COST IMPACTS ON REPRESENTATIVE PERSON OR BUSINESS

The Department is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action.

BUSINESS REPORT

It is necessary for the health, safety, and welfare of the people of the state that this regulation applies to businesses.

EFFECT ON SMALL BUSINESS

The Department has determined that the proposed regulations will have no adverse impact on small businesses. The proposal defines the parameters for the manufacture and operation of reduction chambers, and the application process to sell and use reduction chambers. The proposal applies only to small businesses that choose to manufacture or operate reduction chambers.

CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

The Department has determined that no reasonable alternative considered by the Department or that has otherwise been identified and brought to the attention of the Department which would be more effective in carrying out the purpose for which the action is proposed, or would be as effective and less burdensome to affected private persons than the proposed regulatory action, or would be more cost-effective to affected private persons.

BPC section 7714.3(b), as authorized by AB 351, mandates the Department adopt rules regarding the sale and use of reduction chambers in California. This section also mandates that a reduction facility may only operate a reduction chamber that is approved by the Department and that the Bureau will not issue a license to a reduction facility that is not operating an approved reduction chamber. The Department would be out of compliance with the authorizing legislation if this proposal is not promulgated.

TECHNICAL, THEORETICAL, AND/OR EMPIRICAL STUDIES, REPORTS OR DOCUMENTS RELIED UPON

BPC section 7714.3(b) authorizes the Department to promulgate rules and regulations regarding reduction chambers, a new technology for use in death-care settings. No specific technology is required by this proposal. However, these regulations describe prescriptive and performative standards that specify manufacturing criteria and safe and effective operations of reduction chambers to preserve public health and safety and destroy pathogenic microorganisms, as mandated by statute.

Berge, Glanville, Millner, Klingborn, Methods and microbial risks associated with composting of animal carcasses in the United States (2009) Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association 234.1: 47-56.

Costa and Akdeniz, A Review of the Animal Disease Outbreaks and Biosecure Animal Mortality Composting Systems (April 28, 2019) Waste Management 90:121–131.

Cremation Association of North America, Statement on Natural Organic Reduction (Nov 16, 2022) www.cremationassociation.org/positionstatements.html

Glanville, Richard, Harmon, Reynolds, Ahn, and Akinc, Final Project Report - Environmental Impacts and Biosecurity of Composting for Emergency Disposal of Livestock Mortalities (March 1, 2006) Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Grant Contract#03-7141-08.

Guardabassi, Dalsgaard, Sobsey, Occurrence and survival of viruses in composted human faeces (2003) Sustainable Urban Renewal and Wastewater Treatment, No. 32.

Harvey, Thesis - Biodegradation of Bacillus anthracis Endospores in Compost (Feb 28, 2019) University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

Jones and Martin, A Review of the Literature on the Occurrence and Survival of Pathogens of Animals and Humans in Green Compost (November 2003) The Waste and Resources Action Programme, ISBN:1-84405-063-7.

Meine Erde, Ist die neue Erde schadstoffbelastet? www.meine-erde.de/reerdigung/haeufige-fragen [as of July 10, 2024].

Nemet, Perić, and Lončarić, Microbiological Activities in the Composting Process – A Review (November 28, 2021) Columella Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Vol.8 No.2:41-53.

Ondruschka, Verhoff, & Puschel, „Reerdigung“ – Alternative Bestattung oder Beschleunigte Kompostierung (September 20, 2022) Archiv für Kriminologie 250:67-74.

Schwarz, Höfert, Kutschera, Dreisig, Becker, Kohl, Baumann, Babian, and Dresler, Die „Reerdigung“ (January 17, 2024) Rechtsmedizin 34:86–93. doi.org/10.1007/s00194-023-00681-6.

Siri, Body composition from fluid spaces and density: Analysis of methods (1956) University of California, Berkeley, Radiation Lab.

United States Environmental Protection Agency, 40 CFR Part 503, Standards for the Use or Disposal of Sewage Sludge.

Urry, Cain, Wasserman, Minorsky, Reece, Campbell Biology. 11th ed. (2017) Pearson Education, Inc.

USDA (2017) Livestock Mortality Composting Protocol.

Xiong, Wang, Huo, Yan, Gao, Wang, Gu, and Wang, Effect of Aeration Rates on the Composting Processes and Nitrogen Loss During Composting (September 21, 2017) Applied Environmental Biotechnology Vol.2, Issue 1:1-8.

Xu, Reuter, Inglis, Larney, Alexander, Guan, Stanford, Xu, McAllister, A Biosecure Composting System for Disposal of Cattle Carcasses and Manure Following Infectious Disease Outbreak (2009) J. Environ. Qual., 38: 437-550. doi.org/10.2134/jeq2008.0168

CONTACT PERSON

Inquiries regarding the substance of the proposed regulations described in this notice may be directed to Patrick Woods, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at Patrick.Woods@cdph.ca.gov.

All other inquiries concerning the action described in this notice may be directed to David Martin, Office of Regulations, at (279) 217-0888.

In any inquiries or written comments, please identify the action by using the Department regulation package identifier, DPH-24-012 Reduction Chamber Standards.

AVAILABILITY STATEMENTS

The Department has prepared and has available for public review an initial statement of reasons for the proposed regulations, all the information upon which the proposed regulations are based, and the text of the proposed regulations. The Office of Regulations, 1415 L Street, Suite 500, Sacramento, CA 95814, will be the custodian of public records, including reports, documentation, and other material related to the proposed regulations (rulemaking file).

In order to request that a copy of this public notice, the regulation text, and the initial statement of reasons or alternate formats for these documents be mailed to you, please call David Martin 279-217-0867, (or the California Relay Service at 711), send an email to regulations@cdph.ca.gov, or write to the Office of Regulations at the address previously noted. Upon specific request, these documents will be made available in Braille, large print, audio format, or computer disk.

The full text of any regulation which is changed or modified from the express terms of the proposed action will be made available by the Department's Office of Regulations at least 15 days prior to the date on which the Department adopts, amends, or repeals the resulting regulation.

FINAL STATEMENT OF REASONS
A copy of the final statement of reasons (when prepared) will be available upon request from the Office of Regulations.

INTERNET ACCESS
Materials regarding the action described in this notice (including this public notice, the text of the proposed regulations, and the initial statement of reasons) that are available via the Internet may be accessed at www.cdph.ca.gov by clicking on these links, in the following order: I am Looking For: Administrative, Proposed Regulations, Current Regulatory Proposals.