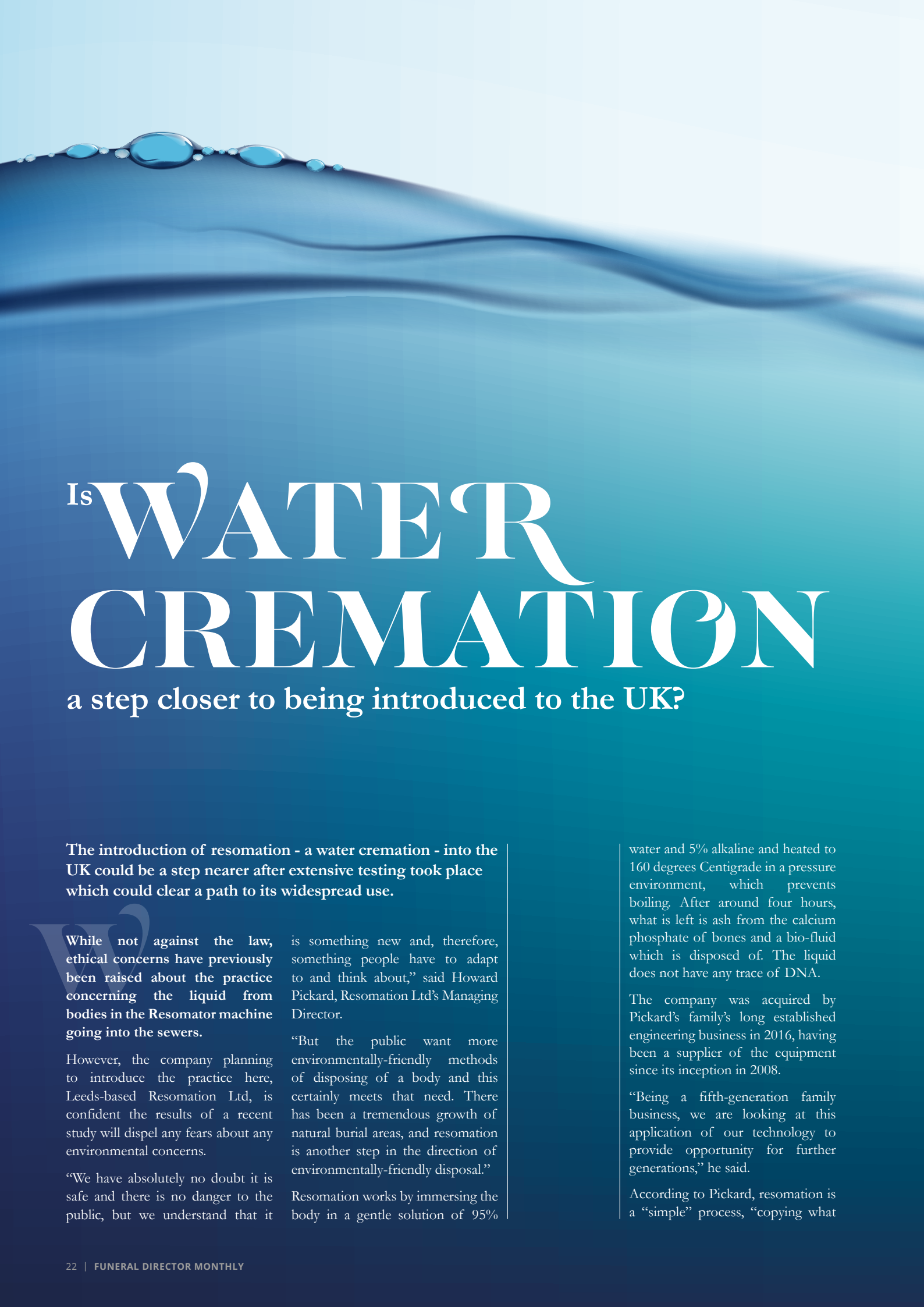




Is WATER CREMATION

a step closer to being introduced to the UK?

The introduction of resomation - a water cremation - into the UK could be a step nearer after extensive testing took place which could clear a path to its widespread use.

While not against the law, ethical concerns have previously been raised about the practice concerning the liquid from bodies in the Resomator machine going into the sewers.

However, the company planning to introduce the practice here, Leeds-based Resomation Ltd, is confident the results of a recent study will dispel any fears about any environmental concerns.

"We have absolutely no doubt it is safe and there is no danger to the public, but we understand that it

is something new and, therefore, something people have to adapt to and think about," said Howard Pickard, Resomation Ltd's Managing Director.

"But the public want more environmentally-friendly methods of disposing of a body and this certainly meets that need. There has been a tremendous growth of natural burial areas, and resomation is another step in the direction of environmentally-friendly disposal."

Resomation works by immersing the body in a gentle solution of 95%

water and 5% alkaline and heated to 160 degrees Centigrade in a pressure environment, which prevents boiling. After around four hours, what is left is ash from the calcium phosphate of bones and a bio-fluid which is disposed of. The liquid does not have any trace of DNA.

The company was acquired by Pickard's family's long established engineering business in 2016, having been a supplier of the equipment since its inception in 2008.

"Being a fifth-generation family business, we are looking at this application of our technology to provide opportunity for further generations," he said.

According to Pickard, resomation is a "simple" process, "copying what



IT IS LEGAL IN 20 STATES IN USA (RESOMATION LTD CLAIMS MORE THAN 5,000 PEOPLE HAVE SO FAR CHOSEN IT) AND FOUR PROVINCES IN CANADA, AND IS EXPECTED TO BE INTRODUCED INTO THE NETHERLANDS NEXT YEAR.

nature does during burial enabling the body to go through the natural process of breaking down to its constituent parts”.

It involves the body being placed in a metal chamber and a four-hour process called alkaline hydrolysis. Much like cremation, the body is reduced to ashes to return to the family.

Pickard is hoping its success will be based on growing lack of burial space and fears of emissions caused by cremation, coupled by growing desire for more environmental funeral options.

It is legal in 20 states in USA (Resomation Ltd claims more than 5,000 people have so far chosen it) and four provinces in Canada, and is expected to be introduced into the Netherlands next year.

Yet in the UK, it has stumbled, primarily since Severn Trent blocked Sandwell Council’s bid to use a resomator in 2017, citing a lack of precedent and blocking an effluent permit, which covers what is allowed into sewers, much to the frustration of Pickard. Central to their concerns was liquid going into the sewers from the liquified remains of dead bodies. Resomation Ltd argued that cannot be as

bad as the blood and chemicals that follow a similar path from hospitals.

“We feel the media was unsympathetic towards us,” said Pickard. “Funeral directors in mortuaries or during embalming use water that comes into contact with bodies, and the liquid used in resomation is treated to the high standards in exactly the same way as all the other waste liquids that go to waste treatment plants.

“Severn Trent deferred to Water UK, and they debated it for 12 months before agreeing they could not reach a consensus and deferred back to individual water companies.”

To get back on the front foot, Resomation Ltd has been gathering data to support its case and hopes that science will technically prove the safe treatment. To perform a water cremation, it is expected to cost around the same as flame cremation.

The company teamed up with a local water company and carried out five resomations, with all the data around the process, safety and environmental factors currently being studied by experts at Middlesex and Sheffield Universities.

It has also been working closely with the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA), which set up a working group to ensure it meets all the guidelines and regulations, and the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) on how users will be trained and certified. Pickard also believes that formal regulation would help bring around greater acceptance but this is currently in the hands of the Law Commission, and it could be some years yet so, in the meantime, the sector will create their own guidelines.

Pickard said they were expecting the results of the data analysis back shortly and, while he was adamant he is not being presumptive, is nevertheless quietly confident they will be positive. The outcome will then be used as a springboard to convince local authorities that resomation is safe and of benefit to the environment and, therefore, offering the public what they want at a time when climate change is high on the political agenda.

“Once local authorities and other organisations are fully informed, we hope they will understand the process and, therefore, the barriers will be removed,” he said. “The results from the data analysis will be huge for us.”

While industry pressure group Water UK declined to return calls for comment, Pickard remains confident that we will see resomation in the UK within 12 months, offering the public a very new and very different method of disposal.

Not as new as what’s been going on in Washington in the United States, where human composting has recently become legal, making it the first state in America to do so.

The process involves the body being placed in a receptacle filled with woodchips, straw and organic matter, whereby it decomposes into around two wheelbarrow’s worth of compost in approximately four weeks.

“Your body is transformed into a usable soil, to grow new life. Your family can then grow a tree and maybe your great-grandchildren will swing from its branches some day,” said Katrina Spade, founder of Recompose.