

Media Policy for Disturbance to Ancestral Human Remains

The Phoenix Metropolitan Area is a cultural landscape that contains buried archaeological resources that represent thousands of years of occupation. Native American communities such as the Gila River Indian Community and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community claim cultural affiliation with the prehistoric cultures who inhabited these archaeological sites. Human remains are frequently encountered during construction and other ground-disturbing activities within the city of Phoenix.

Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) § 41-844 and § 41-865 and their implementing regulations require that the treatment and recovery of human remains be done in a respectful and sensitive manner. Native American communities in Arizona have stated that the public should not be allowed to view human remains during their recovery and that photographs or video film are strictly prohibited. These respectful practices should be applied to any encountered human remains regardless of affiliation.

If the news media or curious bystanders appear at an archaeological site where human remains are being recovered, they should be referred to the City of Phoenix Archaeology Office. They should not be informed that human remains have been encountered.

In order to ensure that the human remains are not observed by anyone other than the archaeologists who are working at the site and by City or State officials, the area around the human remains must be secured with a fence, and cloth should be placed on the fence to prevent the public from viewing their recovery. Only unbleached muslin may be placed on human remains.

According to the Arizona Public Records Act (A.R.S. § 39-125), the City of Phoenix can refuse to provide information to the public about the location of encountered human remains and other sensitive cultural resources in order to protect them from vandalism.

All human remains encountered within the city of Phoenix should be reported to the City of Phoenix Archaeology Office (602-495-0901) and the Arizona State Museum Repatriation Office. For more information about A.R.S. § 41-844 and A.R.S. § 41-865, contact the Arizona State Museum Repatriation Coordinator (520-626-0320). For more information about City of Phoenix projects, contact the City of Phoenix Public Information Office (602-262-7176).