

**Final Arrangements** Our investigation shows that you'll probably pay top dollar for a prepaid funeral. There are much better ways to plan in advance. Even if you're only in your 50s - and especially if you've helped arrange a funeral or attended one lately - three big funeral chains want you to think seriously about dropping dead yourself. No, they don't wish you ill; they just want to sell you a prepaid funeral for thousands of dollars. Cash up front. Today, thank you. An estimated 9 to 11 million Americans have already bought \$21 billion worth of prepaid funerals. Now aggressive marketing has given this familiar product new life. The pitch is simple. Plan ahead and save your family the stress of making arrangements at the worst possible time; lock in your price now to avoid much higher costs later.

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**TEXT BOX:** Prepaid funerals are pitched by the big chains as a way to lock in low prices now. But our survey found that these chains often charge a lot more than other funeral homes.

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But the notion of juggernaut price hikes is largely a myth, according to a Consumer Reports investigation. Indeed, prepaid plans benefit struggling funeral chains more than they protect your pocket book.

The nation's three big funeral chains have used prepaid plans as part of a growth strategy that included borrowing billions of dollars to buy funeral homes from coast to coast. Those chains now own a quarter of the nation's 22,000 funeral homes .....

**Emphasis Added By Editor**

**SOURCE:** Excerpt from Consumer Reports Magazine, May 2001, Pages 28 - 33.

**EDITORIAL NOTE:** Unable to locate a link to an electronic copy of this article. Text transcribed from a hard copy of the referenced magazine in possession of the Editor.