

[<<Back](#)

Vicksburg, MS 01/22/09

Pre-need funeral providers accused of misapplying funds

Posted: Jan 22, 2009 09:40 AM CST

Updated: Jan 23, 2009 07:49 AM CST

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VICKSBURG, MS (WLBT) - Planning funeral arrangements can be very costly. Many people choose to pay installments into what is called a pre-need trust account. But what if you found out the money you set aside for your burial simply disappeared?

The offices of the Secretary of State and Attorney General are investigating several pre-need funeral providers for being deficient in their pre-need trust accounts.

According to the Secretary of State, Green Acres of Vicksburg has a pre-need trust account of only \$221, when it should have \$373,591. The company is also accused of selling pre-need policies without a state license.

The Secretary of State's office found the funeral providers for Prentiss Memorial Gardens in Baldwyn, Sunset Gardens Memorial Park in Laurel, Liberty Memorial Park in Booneville, and Pinecrest Memorial Park in Pittsboro sold \$378,960 worth of contracts. Examiners found at least 50 percent of those funds are unaccounted for.

According to investigators, Southern Mortuary in Jackson lacks more than \$38,230 from its trust fund.

The George West Funeral Home in Natchez came up \$95,000 dollars short, and customers paid the Jackson Mortuary in Aberdeen \$10,000 in pre-need insurance premiums which the company could not properly account for.

In 2004, WLBT reported a burial insurance scam involving Whitehead and Sons Funeral Company.

After our initial reports, lawmakers tightened legislation to protect pre-need customers.

"In a statement released Thursday, Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann said "Misapplying trust funds from someone's funeral arrangements is literally grave robbing. It is unfortunate that we have to go after these companies in court to try to recoup the money that is missing."

State law requires funeral home providers to put at least 85 percent of the funds paid by the buyer into a pre-need trust account.



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