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Colorado Funeral Home Found Storing Decomposed Bodies

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PUEBLO, CO. State inspectors in Colorado discovered approximately 20 decomposing bodies behind a hidden door at Davis Mortuary, a funeral home owned by Pueblo County coroner Brian Cotter, officials said Thursday. Investigators said the coroner may have provided fake ashes to families who requested cremations.

The bodies were found in a room concealed by a cardboard display during an inspection on Wednesday. Inspectors reported a “strong odor of decomposition” upon entering the facility. Cotter had reportedly asked regulators not to enter the room, according to a document from state authorities.

Colorado historically had limited oversight of funeral homes, with few routine inspections or qualifications required for operators. This regulatory gap has contributed to previous abuses, including a separate case in Penrose, Colorado, where nearly 200 decomposing bodies were stored at room temperature. A sentencing for one of those funeral home owners on corpse abuse charges is scheduled for Friday.

The Pueblo discovery occurred during the first inspection of Davis Mortuary under new state rules enacted last year in response to past incidents in Colorado's funeral industry. Previously, inspections could only be conducted if a complaint had been filed. No complaints had been lodged against Davis Mortuary, according to Sam Delp, director of the Division of Professions and Occupations in the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies.

Cotter told inspectors that some bodies had been awaiting cremation for roughly 15 years, leading the state to suspend the mortuary's registration. "This is a profound violation of trust and a heartbreaking betrayal of the families who entrusted their loved ones to this funeral home," said Colorado Bureau of Investigation director Armando Saldate III. Authorities noted that the estimated 20 bodies had not yet been removed, pending careful handling by troopers trained in hazardous materials response.

No arrests have been made, and Pueblo County District Attorney Kala Beauvais confirmed that no charges have been filed as the investigation continues. A representative at the mortuary declined comment and did not make Cotter available for an interview.

Cotter and his brother Chris purchased Davis Mortuary in 1989, describing their operations as "old school," following practices learned from their father, who ran funeral homes in Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska.

In recent years, Colorado has moved to strengthen oversight. Lawmakers approved measures requiring routine inspections, licensing for funeral directors and staff, background checks, national examinations, and educational qualifications. Previously, funeral home operators in the state were not required to hold high school diplomas, degrees, or professional certifications.

The Pueblo case follows other high-profile incidents in the state, including convictions of Grand Junction funeral home owners for selling body parts and providing fake ashes, as well as a separate incident where a deceased woman's body was left in a hearse for over a year, with cremated remains found stashed in a funeral director's home.

Colorado regulators said the new laws aim to bring the state's funeral home oversight in line with national standards, ensuring safety, dignity, and accountability for families relying on these services.