

1. Why are we testing memorials?

In 2001 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) launched a 'Be Respectful, Be Safe' campaign to try and improve the safety of cemeteries and churchyards. More recently, all local authorities that are responsible for cemeteries and churchyards are being asked to carry out safety checks on memorials, to ensure that they are in a good and stable condition and not likely to topple over. The safety checks are in line with advice from the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) following a recent letter from the chairman of the HSC, Bill Callaghan, which highlighted the fact that across the country there have been 21 serious accidents, including seven fatalities during the last ten years.

2. What do the safety tests involve?

All inspection and testing will be carried out professionally by a qualified person using a procedure recommended by the memorial mason industry and professional associations. The inspection consists of two stages:

[li] **Visual inspection.** This identifies those memorials that are too dangerous to test manually.

[li] **Manual test.** This is a push/pull hand test to see if there is any movement in the memorial.

3. What happens if we find a problem?

[li] We notify the deed holders of any memorials which we find to be unstable.

[li] We will place a safety notice on the headstone informing people that the memorial has been found to be unsafe and the action to be taken

[li] We could also fence the area off around the memorial or in very dangerous situations lay the memorial flat.

[li] Although the council has a duty of care to ensure the cemetery is safe, the responsibility for memorials lies with the owner of the Deed of Grant of Exclusive Rights of Burial.

[li] We recommend that you should contact the memorial mason that supplied the memorial as soon as possible to arrange for it to be fixed and made safe.

A stonemason will ensure that work carried out on the memorial is done to the proper professional standards issued by the National Association of Memorial Masons.

We fully appreciate that this may be upsetting for bereaved families, and we apologise for any distress it may cause.

Memorials are a lasting tribute to our loved ones and through careful testing to ensure their safety, we would like to work with you to ensure that all the memorials in our cemetery remain a fitting tribute for years to come.

4. Can I repair the memorial myself?

Yes. You are fully entitled to undertake work on the memorial yourself as long as you use a Memorial Mason approved by the council. Do not forget you must also inform the Clerk that you are getting the memorial repaired. However, we would strongly encourage you to arrange for the work to be carried out by a stonemason working to the national guidelines. If you carry out the work yourself and inform us of this, we will continue to test the memorial annually to ensure that the memorial remains safe.

5. What will the Council not do?

The council will not:

[li] remove the memorial from its site.

[li] lay the headstone flat on the ground, except in exceptional circumstances when the memorial is likely to present a serious hazard soon.

6. What will happen if memorial owners cannot be traced?

Where a memorial has failed the testing, and the grave owner cannot be traced the council will make the memorial safe by either partially sinking or by repairing. Care will be taken to ensure, where possible, that inscriptions are not affected. This will enable a full repair at a later stage if required.

7. What have we done to inform visitors and owners of memorials?

Notices were placed on gates at the entrance to the Cemetery and around the grounds to let people know in advance that this work will be taking place. In addition, notices have been posted in the local newspapers as well as on the council's Facebook page and website.

8. Will we need to carry out testing again in the future?

Yes. The testing of memorials will need to be effectively monitored and will require an ongoing programme based on the first round of testing. After a period of six months from us originally notifying you that the memorial had failed testing, we will contact you again to ask what action you have taken to make the memorial safe. If you tell us that the memorial has been made safe, we will update our records.