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More than 115 bodies 'improperly' stored at 'green' funeral home

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CBS

| Authorities have said it is not clear if a crime has been committed

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Identifying the remains could take months.

After searching an area of more than 2,500 sq ft (232 sq m) earlier this week, authorities discovered "improperly stored" bodies, which were creating a "hazardous scene", officials said at a press conference on Friday.

Located in Penrose, Colorado - about 30 miles (48km) south of Colorado Springs - The Return to Nature Funeral Home specialises in burials where no chemicals, including embalming fluid, are used and where remains are buried in a biodegradable casket.

The FBI and the Colorado Bureau of Investigation have been assisting the Fremont County Sheriff's Office with the investigation.

"Without providing too much detail to avoid further victimizing these families, the air of the funeral home where the bodies were stored was horrific," said Fremont County Sheriff Allen Cooper on Friday.

Colorado Governor Jared Polis issued a local disaster emergency, making state resources more readily available to investigators.

It is not yet clear if the bodies were intended for burial or cremation, though the funeral home's website says they stopped offering cremation services in July 2023.

"There have been a lot of questions and concerns expressed by the community, especially those families who entrusted their loved ones to this funeral home," Mr Cooper said. "Our priority and our focus is on the families."

Fremont County Coroner Randy Keller warned the investigation will be a "very lengthy process" because of the need to conduct forensic identification, like obtaining fingerprints and DNA. The FBI said additional investigators are being dispatched from Quantico, Virginia - like a technical hazardous response team and a disaster recovery team - and are expected to arrive in the coming days.

"These are teams with additional training and specialised equipment that serve to process scenes of national magnitude, including the response to 9/11 and major airline incidents," said FBI Special Agent Mark Michalek.

Families will be notified once the identities of the bodies are confirmed. The county is asking that family members who used the Return to Nature Funeral Home email them.

There is also a family crisis centre and phone line.

The BBC has reached out to The Return to Nature Funeral Home for comment.

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