

**State Historic Preservation Office/
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Human Remains Discovery Protocol
(January 2025)**

If human remains are encountered during construction or archaeological investigations for projects being reviewed under Section 14.09 of the State Historic Preservation Act or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the New York State Historic Preservation Office (“SHPO”) recommends that the following protocol be implemented.

- Human remains shall be treated with dignity and respect. Should human remains or suspected human remains be encountered, work in the general area of the discovery shall stop immediately and the location shall be secured and protected from damage and disturbance.
- If skeletal remains are identified and the archaeologist is not able to conclusively determine if they are human, the remains and any associated materials shall be left in place. A qualified forensic anthropologist, bioarchaeologist, or physical anthropologist shall assess the remains in situ to help determine if they are human.
- If the remains are determined to be human, law enforcement, the SHPO, the appropriate Indigenous Nations, and the involved state and federal agencies shall be notified immediately. If law enforcement determines that the burial site is not a criminal matter, no skeletal remains or associated materials shall be removed until appropriate consultation has concluded.
- If human remains are determined to be Indigenous, they shall be left in place and protected from further disturbance until a plan for their avoidance or removal is fully implemented. Please note that avoidance is the preferred option of the SHPO and the Indigenous Nations. The involved agency shall consult SHPO and the appropriate Indigenous Nations to develop a plan of action. Photographs of Indigenous human remains and associated materials should not be taken without consulting with the involved Indigenous Nations.
- If human remains are determined to be non-Indigenous, the remains shall be left in place and protected from further disturbance until a plan for their avoidance or removal is fully implemented. Please note that avoidance is the preferred option of the SHPO. The involved agency shall consult SHPO and other appropriate parties to develop a plan of action.
- The SHPO recommends that burial information is not released to the public to protect burial sites from possible looting.

NOTE: If human remains are encountered outside of a Section 14.09 or Section 106 project, you must follow the procedures of the New York State Unmarked Burial Site Protection Act (<https://nysm.nysed.gov/unmarked-burial-site-protection-act>).