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*Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery  
Policy Letter 16-001*

**FLAG ETIQUETTE**

- 1. PURPOSE:** To provide guidance on the proper etiquette and protocol for the handling, display, and disposal of the United States flag.
- 2. AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL:** For the purpose of this policy, the Director of the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Affairs (RIOVA) and the Administrator of the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery (RIVMC) are the "designated person in-charge" unless otherwise stated. The Director and Administrator may delegate responsibilities as necessary to ensure the policy standards are consistently maintained.
- 3. GOVERNING LAWS:** 4 U.S.C. § 1, Public Law 94-344, known as the Federal Flag Code, contains rules for handling and displaying the U.S. flag.
- 4. RESPONSIBILITIES:** All employees of RIVMC will be trained on the procedures set forth below. Failure to comply may be deemed just cause for disciplinary action.
- 5. FEDERAL FLAG CODE:**

**DISPLAY OF THE NATIONAL FLAG [4 U.S.C. § 7]**

When flown from a stationary flagstaff, the United States flag may be flown twenty-four hours per day, provided that the flag is properly illuminated during the hours of darkness;

- a) The flag shall not be draped over the hood, top, sides, or back of a vehicle. When the flag is displayed on a motorcar, the staff shall be fixed firmly to the chassis or clamped to the right fender.
- b) No other flag or pennant shall be placed above or, if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America. No person shall display the flag of the United Nations or any other national or international flag equal, above, or in a position of superior prominence or honor to, or in place of, the flag of the United States at any place within the United States, or any Territory.
- c) The flag of the United States of America, when it is displayed with another flag against a wall from crossed staffs, shall be on the right, the flag's own right, and its staff shall be in front of the staff of the other flag.

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- d) The flag of the United States of America shall be at the center and at the highest point of the group when a number of flags of States or localities, or pennants of societies are grouped and displayed from staffs.
- e) When flags of States, cities, or localities, or pennants of societies are flown on the same halyard with the flag of the United States, the latter shall always be at the peak. When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the flag of the United States shall be hoisted first and lowered last. No such flag or pennant may be placed above the flag of the United States or to the United States flag's right.
- f) When flags of two or more nations are displayed, they are to be flown from separate staffs of the same height. The flags shall be of approximately equal size. International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace.
- g) When the flag of the United States is displayed from a staff projecting horizontally, or at an angle from the window sill, balcony, or front of a building, the union of the flag shall be placed at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half-staff. When the flag is suspended over a sidewalk from a rope extending from a house to a pole at the edge of the sidewalk, the flag shall be hoisted out, union first, from the building.
- h) When displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union shall be uppermost and to the flag's own right, that is, to the observer's left. When displayed in a window, the flag shall be displayed in the same way, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street.
- i) When the flag is displayed over the middle of the street, it shall be suspended vertically with the union to the north in an east and west street or to the east in a north and south street.
- j) When used on a speaker's platform, the flag, if displayed flat, shall be displayed above and behind the speaker. When displayed from a staff in a church or public auditorium, the flag of the United States of America shall hold the position of superior prominence, in advance of the audience, and in the position of honor at the clergyman's or speaker's right as he faces the audience. Any other flag so displayed shall be placed on the left of the clergyman or speaker or to the right of the audience.
- k) The flag shall form a distinctive feature of the ceremony of unveiling a statue or monument, but it shall never be used as the covering for the statue or monument.

### HALF-STAFF OF THE NATIONAL FLAG [4 U.S.C. § 7]

- a) The flag, when flown at half-staff, shall be first hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag shall be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day.
- b) On Memorial Day the flag shall be displayed at half-staff until noon only, then raised to the top of the staff.
- c) By order of the President, the flag shall be flown at half-staff upon the death of principal figures of the United States Government and the Governor of a State, territory, or possession, as a mark of respect to their memory.

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- d) In the event of the death of a present or former official of the government of any State, territory, or possession of the United States or the death of a member of the Armed Forces from any State, territory, or possession who dies while serving on active duty, the Governor of that State, territory, or
- e) The flag shall be flown at half-staff on Peace Officers Memorial Day, unless that day is also Armed Forces Day.

### HANDLING OF THE UNITED STATES FLAG [4 U.S.C. § 8]

The flag of the United States shall never be handled in a manner that would indicate an attitude of disrespect. The following shall be observed:

- a) The flag shall never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.
- b) The flag shall never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise.
- c) The flag shall never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free.
- d) The flag shall never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It shall never be festooned, drawn back, nor up, in folds, but always allowed to fall free. Bunting of blue, white, and red, always arranged with the blue above, the white in the middle, and the red below, shall be used for covering a speaker's desk, draping the front of the platform, and for decoration in general.
- e) The flag shall never be fastened, displayed, used, or stored in such a manner as to permit it to be easily torn, soiled, or damaged in any way.
- f) The flag shall never be used as a covering for a ceiling.
- g) The flag shall never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature.
- h) The flag shall never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.
- i) The flag shall never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It shall not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard. Advertising signs shall not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.
- j) No part of the flag shall never be used as a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be affixed to the uniform of military personnel, firemen, policemen, and members of patriotic organizations. The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin being a replica, shall be worn on the left lapel near the heart.
- k) The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, shall be destroyed in dignified way, preferably by burning.

### CLEANING OR DISPOSAL OF THE NATIONAL FLAG

- a) When the United States flag has become soiled, it may be either hand washed or dry cleaned, depending upon the material from which the flag is constructed.
- b) When the flag is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, it shall be destroyed as a whole, using the flag retirement protocol in Enclosure 2.

### **6. FLAG DISTRIBUTION:**

- a) Stick flags will be provided to veterans' organizations and other representatives to commemorate Veteran's Day and Memorial Day. Additional flags may be provided upon approval of the Administrator.
- b) Flag distribution will be recorded in the log to ensure accountability.

### **7. FLAG DISPLAY THROUGHOUT THE CEMETERY:**

- a) Flags are not permitted on individual grave markers. This is not only to uphold the appearance of the cemetery and the safety of the maintenance staff, but also to ensure all flags are able to be maintained and treated with respect.
- b) At the discretion of the Administrator, flags may be placed throughout the cemetery on Veteran's Day and Memorial Day, and when approved for other ceremonies.

### **8. FLAG INTAKE PROCEDURE:** The RIVMC may receive flags from customers, veterans' organizations, or other individuals seeking proper retirement. RIVMC will accept the flags when in accordance with the following requirements:

- Single flags must be folded. For deliveries exceeding 25 flags, the folded flags must be placed in clear plastic bags.
- Stick flags must be rolled and bound (rubber bands, string, etc.) in groups of ten, or less.
- Prior to accepting the flags, RIVMC administrative staff will complete the "Flag Retirement Delivery" (FRD) form (Enclosure 1). The form must be signed by the individual delivering the flags and the RIVMC employee accepting the delivery.
- Flags will be held at the Administration Office until transferred by RIVMC maintenance personnel to the designated flag storage area. The transfer of the flags to the storage area will be noted on the FRD form.
- *No flags will be stored at any other location.*
- Proper retirement of the flags will be coordinated through the Administrator. Whenever possible, retirement of the flags will be done in coordination with the local American Legion post. The date of the final ceremony will be noted on the FRD form.

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- After the flags have been transferred to the designated flag storage area in the new maintenance building, the FRD form will be filed in the Administration Office.
- The Administrator reserves the right to transport flags to a licensed incinerator facility in accordance with retirement protocol if required.

### **9. FLAG STORAGE:**

- a) All flags awaiting proper retirement will be folded, bagged, and placed on a pallet within the new maintenance facility. The maintenance supervisor is responsible for flag accountability.
- b) RIVMC staff will notate the FRD form when flags are transferred from the Administration Office to the new maintenance facility and again when the flags are retired.

**10. CONTACT:** For questions concerning this policy letter, contact the Administrator at 401-268-3088.

**Enclosures: (1) Flag Retirement Delivery Form  
(2) Flag folding and Retirement Protocol**

**RHODE ISLAND OFFICE OF VETERAN AFFAIRS**



**VETERAN MEMORIAL CEMETERY**

**Flag Retirement Delivery**

On \_\_\_\_\_, (date) \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Agency/Person) provided \_\_\_\_\_ (#) unserviceable U.S. Flags to the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery for the purpose of proper retirement from service.

Delivered to the RIVMC in clear bag(s) and/or container(s):

# Folded Flags \_\_\_\_\_

#Flags on Sticks \_\_\_\_\_

Contact # or email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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**For Agency Use Only**

Please ensure all flags are properly folded and delivered in clear bags or containers in accordance with the RIVMC guidance.

	Date	Name	Initials	Comments
Intake				
Transfer to secure storage area				
Retirement				

Administrator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **FLAG RETIREMENT CEREMONY PROTOCOL**

### **A. Fire Preparation:**

1. Coordinate with the Exeter Fire Department.
2. Determine a suitable day for burning based on weather conditions.
3. Ensure the Administrator or veteran's service organization is available to conduct the ceremony.
4. Build a sizeable fire. It is important that the fire be sizable -- preferably having burnt down to a bed of red hot coals to avoid bits of the flag being carried off by a roaring fire -- yet be of sufficient intensity to ensure complete burning of the flag.

### **B. Flag Preparation:**

The color guard assigned to the flag opens up its tri-corner fold and then refolds the flag in a coffin-shaped rectangle.

### **C. Ceremony of Final Tribute:**

1. Only one flag should be used in the ceremony, which is representative of all the flags to be burned in the service. The remainder of the flags collected should be incinerated.
2. The ceremony should be conducted out-of-doors, preferably in conjunction with the local American Legion post. The ceremony will be solemn, reverent and respectful of the flag's service to the nation.
3. The ceremony typically involves two color guards, one for the flag currently in use and a special color guard for the flag to be retired from service. Of course, this may be adapted if conditions necessitate.
4. Just before sunset the flag which has been flying all day is retired in the normal ceremonial procedure for that location or group.
5. The color guard responsible for the flag receiving the final tribute moves to front and center. The leader should present this color guard with the flag which has been selected for its final tribute and subsequent destruction. The leader should instruct the color guard to "hoist the colors."
6. Leader comments: (when the flag has been secured at the top of the pole)

"This flag has served its nation well and long. It has worn to a condition in which it should no longer be used to represent the nation."

"This flag represents all of the flags collected and being retired from service today. The honor we show here this evening for this one flag, we are showing for all of the flags, even those not physically here."

7. The leader should:
  - o Call the group to attention;
  - o Order a salute;
  - o Lead the entire group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag; and
  - o Order the flag retired by the color guard.

## Enclosure 2

- Slowly and ceremoniously lower and then respectfully fold the flag in the customary triangle. Deliver the flag to the leader and then dismiss the group.
8. This concludes the Ceremony of Final Tribute

### **D. Ceremonial Burning.** When all is ready:

1. Assemble around the fire. The leader calls the group to attention.
2. The color guard comes forward and places the flag on the fire.
3. All briskly salute.
4. After the salute, but while still at attention, the leader may say a few words, followed by silence.
5. The leader and the color guard remain until the flag is completely consumed.



Enclosure 2

**The traditional method of folding the flag is as follows:**

Straighten out the flag to full length and fold lengthwise once.



A)



Fold it lengthwise a second time to meet the open edge, making sure that the union of stars on the blue field remains outward in full view. (A large flag may have to be folded lengthwise a third time.)

B)



A triangular fold is then started by bringing the striped corner of the folded edge to the open edge.

C)



The outer point is then turned inward, parallel with the open edge, to form a second triangle.

D)



The diagonal or triangular folding is continued toward the blue union until the end is reached, with only the blue showing and the form being that of a cocked (three-corner) hat.



E)

