

Standards of Respect

The Flag Code, which formalizes and unifies the traditional ways in which we give respect to the flag, also contains specific instructions on how the flag is not to be used. They are:

The flag should never be dipped to any person or thing. It is flown upside down only as a distress signal.

The flag should not be used as a drapery, or for covering a speaker's desk, draping a platform, or for any decoration in general. Bunting of blue, white and red stripes is available for these purposes. The blue stripe of the bunting should be on the top.

The flag should never be used for any advertising purpose. It should not be embroidered, printed or otherwise impressed on such articles as cushions, handkerchiefs, napkins, boxes, or anything intended to be discarded after temporary use. Advertising signs should not be attached to the staff or halyard.

The flag should not be used as part of a costume or athletic uniform, except that a flag patch may be used on the uniform of military personnel, fireman, policeman and members of patriotic organizations.

The flag should never have placed on it, or attached to it, any mark, insignia, letter, word, number, figure, or drawing of any kind.

The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.

When the flag is lowered, no part of it should touch the ground or any other object; it should be received by waiting hands and arms. To store the flag it should be folded neatly and ceremoniously.

The flag should be cleaned and mended when necessary.

When a flag is so worn it is no longer fit to serve as a symbol of our country, it should be destroyed by burning in a dignified manner.

Note: Most American Legion Posts regularly conduct a dignified flag burning ceremony, often on Flag

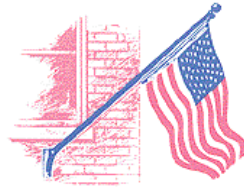
Day, June 14th. Contact your local American Legion Hall and inquire about the availability of this service.

Displaying the Flag Outdoors

When the flag is displayed from a staff projecting from a window, balcony, or a building, the union should be at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half staff.

When it is displayed from the same flagpole with another flag - of a state, community, society or Scout unit - the flag of the United States must always be at the top except that the church pennant may be flown above the flag during church services for Navy personnel when conducted by a Naval chaplain on a ship at sea.

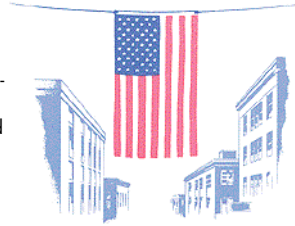
When the flag is displayed over a street, it should be hung vertically, with the union to the north or east. If the flag is suspended over a sidewalk, the flag's union should be farthest from the building.



...No other flag ever should be placed above it.

...The flag of the United States is always the first flag raised and the last to be lowered.

When flown with the national banner of other countries, each flag must be displayed from a separate pole of the same height. Each flag should be the same size. They should be raised and lowered simultaneously. The flag of one nation may not be displayed above that of another nation.



Raising and Lowering the Flag

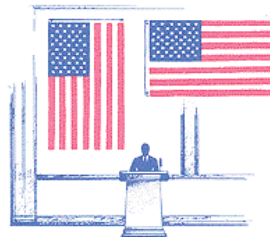
The flag should be raised briskly and lowered slowly and ceremoniously. Ordinarily it should be displayed only between sunrise and sunset. It should be illuminated if displayed at night. The flag of the United States of America is saluted as it is hoisted and lowered. The salute is held until the flag is unsnapped from the halyard or through the last note of music, whichever is the longest.

Displaying the Flag Indoors

When on display, the flag is accorded the place of honor, always positioned to its own right. Place it to the right of the speaker or staging area or sanctuary. Other flags should be to the left.

The flag of the United States of America should be at the center and at the highest point of the group when a number of flags of states, localities, or societies are grouped for display.

When one flag is used with the flag of the United States of America and the staffs are crossed, the flag of the United States is placed on its own right with its staff in front of the other flag.



When displaying the flag against a wall, vertically or horizontally, the flag's union (stars) should be at the top, to the flag's own right, and to the observer's left.

When flown with flags of states, communities, or societies on separate flag poles which are of the same height and in a straight line, the flag of the United States is always placed in the position of honor - to its own right.

...The other flags may be smaller but none may be larger.

Parading and Saluting the Flag

When carried in a procession, the flag should be to the right of the marchers. When other flags are carried, the flag of the United States may be centered in front of the others or carried to their right. When the flag passes in a procession, or when it is hoisted or lowered, all should face the flag and salute.

The Salute

To salute, all persons come to attention. Those in uniform give the appropriate formal salute. Citizens not in uniform salute by placing their right hand over the heart and men with head cover should remove it and hold it to left shoulder, hand over the heart. Members of organizations in formation salute upon command of the person in charge.

The Pledge of Allegiance and National Anthem

The pledge of allegiance should be rendered by standing at attention, facing the flag, and saluting. When the national anthem is played or sung, citizens should stand at attention and salute at the first note and hold the salute through the last note. The salute is directed to the flag, if displayed, otherwise to the music.

The Flag in Mourning

To place the flag at half staff, hoist it to the peak for an instant and lower it to a position half way between the top and bottom of the staff. The flag is to be raised again to the peak for a moment before it is lowered. On Memorial Day the flag is displayed at half staff until noon and at full staff from noon to sunset.

The flag is to be flown at half staff in mourning for designated, principal government leaders and upon presidential or gubernatorial order.

When used to cover a casket, the flag should be placed with the union at the head and over the left shoulder. It should not be lowered into the grave.



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Frequently Asked Questions About the Flag

Q: What do the colors and gold fringe on the American Flag mean?

A: Sentimental writers and orators sometimes ascribe meanings to the colors in the flag.

From the book "Our Flag" published in 1989 by the House of Representatives... "On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress passed a resolution authorizing a committee to devise a seal for the United States of America. This mission, designed to reflect the Founding Fathers' beliefs, values, and sovereignty of the new Nation, did not become a reality until June 20, 1782. In heraldic devices, such as seals, each element has a specific meaning. Even colors have specific meanings. The colors red, white, and blue did not have meanings for The Stars and Stripes when it was adopted in 1777.

However, the colors in the Great Seal did have specific meanings. Charles Thompson, Secretary of the Continental Congress, reporting to Congress on the Seal, stated: "The colors of the pales (the vertical stripes) are those used in the flag of the United States of America; White signifies purity and innocence, Red, hardness & valour, and Blue, the color of the Chief (the broad band above the stripes) signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice."

The gold trim is generally used on ceremonial indoor flags that are used for special services and is believed to have been first used in a military setting. It has no specific significance that I have ever run across, and its (gold trim) use is in compliance with applicable flag codes and laws. .

Q: What is meant by the flag's own right?

A: The "right" as the position of honor developed from the time when the "right hand" was the "weapon hand" or "point of danger." The right hand, raised without a weapon, was a sign of peace. The right hand, to any observer, is the observer's left. Therefore, as used in the Flag Code, the flag and/or blue field is displayed to the left of the observer, which is the flag's "own right." (ref: Flag Code 7(d),(i))

Q: Can a flag that has been used to cover a casket be displayed after its original use?

A: There are no provisions in the Flag Code to suggest otherwise. It would be a fitting tribute to the memory of the deceased veteran and their service to a grateful nation if their casket flag were displayed.

Q: Can the United States flag be displayed on days when the weather is inclement?

A: The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all weather (nylon or other non-absorbent material) flag is displayed. (Ref Flag Code 6(c))

Q: What is the significance of displaying the flag at half-staff?

A: This gesture is a sign to indicate the nation mourns the death of an individual(s). Only the President of the United States or the Governor of the State may order the flag to be half-staffed. (ref: Flag Code 7(m))

Q: When the flag is not flown from a staff, how should it be displayed?

A: It should be displayed vertically, whether indoors or out, and suspended so that its folds fall free as though the flag were staffed. The stripes may be displayed either horizontally or vertically against a wall, the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right; that is, to the observer's left. When displayed in a window of a home or a place of business, the flag should be displayed in the same way; that is, with the union or blue field to the left of the observer in the street. (Ref Flag Code 7(i))

Q: How are unserviceable flags destroyed?

A: The Flag Code suggests that, "when a flag has served its useful purpose, it should be destroyed, preferably by burning." For individual citizens, this

should be done discreetly so the act of destruction is not perceived as a protest or desecration. Many American Legion Posts conduct Disposal of Unserviceable Flag Ceremonies on June 14, Flag Day. This ceremony creates a particularly dignified and solemn occasion for the retirement of unserviceable flags. (ref: Flag Code 8(k))

Q: Are you required to destroy the flag if it touches the ground?

A: Flag Code section 176b states that the flag should not touch anything beneath it such as the ground. This is stated to indicate that care should be exercised in the handling of the flag, to protect it from becoming soiled or damaged. You ARE NOT required to destroy the flag when this happens. As long as the flag remains suitable for display, even if washing or dry-cleaning (which is acceptable practice) is required, you may continue to display the flag as a symbol of our great country. (ref: Flag Code 8(b))

Q: What is the proper method for folding the flag?

A: The Flag Code does not require any specific method, however, there is a tradition that has developed over time. This method produces a triangular shaped form like that of a three corner hat with only the blue union showing.

Q: May a person, other than a veteran, have their casket draped with the flag of the United States?

A: Yes, although this honor is usually reserved for veterans or highly regarded state and national figures, the Flag Code does not prohibit this use.

Q: Is it proper to fly the flag of the United States 24 hours a day?

A: The Flag Code states it is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flag staffs in the open. However, when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed twenty-four hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness. (ref: Flag Code 6(a))

Q: What are the penalties for the physical desecration of the flag?

A: There are currently no penalties for the physical desecration of the flag.

Q: Where does the flag fly 24 hours a day?

A: After the addition of the new House and Senate wings in the 1850s, even before the great dome was completed in 1863, photographs of the period show flags flying over each new wing and the central east and west fronts. The custom of flying the flags 24 hours a day over the east and west fronts was begun during World War I. This was done in response to requests received from all over the country urging that the flag of the United States be flown continuously over the public buildings in Washington, DC.

- Presidential proclamations and laws since that time authorize the display of the flag 24 hours a day at the following places:
- Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, Baltimore, Maryland (Presidential Proclamation No.2795, July 2, 1948).
- Flag House Square, Albemarle and Pratt Streets, Baltimore Maryland (Public Law 83-319, approved March 26, 1954).
- United States Marine Corp Memorial (Iwo Jima), Arlington, Virginia (Presidential Proclamation No.3418, June 12, 1961).
- On the Green of the Town of Lexington, Massachusetts (Public Law 89-335, approved November 8, 1965).
- The White House, Washington, DC. (Presidential Proclamation No.4000, September 4,1970). Washington Monument, Washington, DC. (Presidential Proclamation No.4064, July 6,1971, effective July 4, 1971). Fifty flags of the United States are displayed at the Washington Monument continuously.
- United States Customs Ports of Entry which are continually open (Presidential Proclamation No.4131, May 5, 1972).
- Grounds of the National Memorial Arch in Valley Forge State Park, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania (Public Law 94-53, approved July 4, 1975).
- Many other places fly the flag at night as a patriotic gesture by custom.

Flag Etiquette and FAQ

