

Flag Rules and Regulations

Questions about proper Flag Code

www.ushistory.org

Sign up for Half Staff Notifications at

www.halfstaff.org

Flag should be displayed

- It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flagstaffs 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.
- The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously.
- The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all-weather flag is displayed.
- The flag should be displayed on all days, especially on
 - New Year's Day, January 1
 - Inauguration Day, January 20
 - Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, third Monday in January
 - Lincoln's Birthday, February 12
 - Washington's Birthday, third Monday in February
 - Easter Sunday (variable)
 - Mother's Day, second Sunday in May
 - Armed Forces Day, third Saturday in May
 - Memorial Day (half-staff until noon), the last Monday in May
 - Flag Day, June 14
 - Father's Day, third Sunday in June
 - Independence Day, July 4
 - Labor Day, first Monday in September
 - Constitution Day, September 17
 - Columbus Day, second Monday in October
 - Navy Day, October 27
 - Veterans Day, November 11
 - Thanksgiving Day, fourth Thursday in November
 - Christmas Day, December 25
 - and such other days as may be proclaimed by the President of the United States
 - the birthdays of States (date of admission)
 - and on State holidays.
- The flag should be displayed daily on or near the main administration building of every public institution.
- The flag should be displayed in or near every polling place on election days.
- The flag should be displayed during school days in or near every schoolhouse

When should I fly at half mast

- **May 15** — Peace Officers Memorial Day: half-staff from sunrise to sunset
- **Last Monday in May** — Memorial Day: the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon
- **September 11** — Patriot Day: half-staff from sunrise to sunset
- **Sunday, usually of week in which October 9th falls** — Fire Prevention Week: half-staff from sunrise to sunset. See [Public Law 107-51](#)
- **December 7** — National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day: half-staff from sunrise to sunset

- Upon reliable information that the current or former President, current Vice-President, current or former Chief Justice, or current Speaker of the House has died
- Upon [Presidential proclamation](#) (see next) or your state's governor (see after)
- [Presidential proclamation](#)
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/proclamations>

The flag, when flown at half-staff, should be first hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day. On Memorial Day the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon only, then raised to the top of the staff. 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. In the event of the death of other officials or foreign dignitaries, the flag is to be displayed at half-staff according to Presidential instructions or orders, or in accordance with recognized customs or practices not inconsistent with law. **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 possession may proclaim that the National flag shall be flown at half-staff,** and the same authority is provided to the Mayor of the District of Columbia with respect to present or former officials of the District of Columbia and members of the Armed Forces from the District of Columbia. **The flag shall be flown at half-staff 30 days from the death of the President or a former President; 10 days from the day of death of the Vice President, the Chief Justice or a retired Chief Justice of the United States, or the Speaker of the House of Representatives; from the day of death until interment of an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, a Secretary of an executive or military department, a former Vice President, or the Governor of a State, territory, or possession; and on the day of death and the following day for a Member of Congress.** The flag shall be flown at half-staff on Peace Officers Memorial Day, unless that day is also Armed Forces Day. As used in this subsection —

FYI

- Can the US flag be flown at half staff and the state flag be flown underneath of it on the same pole?
- **Yes.** The US flag should be at a point midway on the pole and the state flag should fly beneath it.
- When the US flag is at half-staff, do other foreign flags fly at full-staff?
- **Yes.** "The flag of the United States will be flown at half-staff whether or not the flag of another nation is flown at full staff alongside the United States flag."
- When the US flag is at half mast, should other flags (state, city, company) be flown at half mast?
- **Yes,** they should. Here is what Section 7f of the [Flag Code](#) states:
- 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 should always be at the peak. When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the flag of the United States should 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. Therefore, when the US flag is flown at half-mast, other non-national flags should also fly at half-mast.

How to display at meetings

- When used on a speaker's platform, the flag, if displayed flat, should 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 should 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 should be placed on the left of the clergyman or speaker or to the right of the audience.

How to display out front of building

- **Where should the flag be mounted as it relates to the front of a house?**
- It is traditionally flown either to the right or the left of the front door. It can be on either side. When there is a choice, find a position of prominence. Sometimes that is the left of the door, sometimes the right, sometimes away from the door, but centered on the house (when you have a porch, for example). Use your best judgment to find a nice position for the flag. However, if you fly a second flag, then the US flag must be on the viewer's left of the other flag, as you approach the house.
- **We are flying the US flag, our state flag, and our company flag on side-to-side poles. What order should they be in?**
- Facing the display, from left to right: US flag, state flag, company flag. If you are flying them on two poles, place the US flag on the leftmost pole, and the state flag over the company flag on the right pole (check your state Flag Code to be sure this is acceptable). You may not fly a company flag on the same pole as the US flag.
- **Doesn't the US flag fly on the tall center pole?**
- Yes. When the three poles are the same height, the priority is left to right. When the center pole is taller, then the position of prominence is the center pole, then the left, then the right.
- **The American flag is on top. But, can a company flag fly beneath it on the same pole?**
- **No.** Corporate banners are a form of branding, and, as such, a form of advertising. Section 8i of the [Flag Code](#) reads:

Respect for the Flag

- No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America; the flag should not be dipped to any person or thing. **Regimental colors, State flags, and organization or institutional flags are to be dipped as a mark of honor.**
- The flag should never be displayed with the union down, except as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.
- The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise.
- The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free.
- The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It should 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, should be used for covering a speaker's desk, draping the front of the platform, and for decoration in general.
- The flag should 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.
- The flag should never be used as a covering for a ceiling.
- The flag should 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.
- The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.
- The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should 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 should not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.
- No part of the flag should ever 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, should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.
- The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning

Where and how to dispose of

- Section 8k of the [Flag Code](#) states, "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning." We recommend that you contact your local [VFW](#) Chapter and ask them for help properly disposing of your flag. And be sure to consider providing a small donation to them for their assistance. Or you can contact your local [Elks Lodge](#) (who created the idea of Flag Day, established officially by President Truman, himself a member of the Elks), the American Legion, or the Knights of Columbus. Some Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops also can provide this service.
- Modern flag retirement ceremonies, often held annually on Flag Day, sometimes feature the symbolic burning of a single flag (cotton or wool) and the burial of the others. This is both safe and respectful.

Did You Know

- **When was the Flag Code established?**
- On June 22, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed the Federal Flag Code, which led to Congressional enactment on December 22, 1942.
- The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should 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 should not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.
- **What do the colors red, white, and blue of the American flag symbolize?**
- The Continental Congress left no record to show why it chose the colors. However, in 1782, the Congress of the Confederation chose these same colors for the Great Seal of the United States and listed their meaning as follows: white to mean purity and innocence, red for valor and hardiness, and blue for vigilance, perseverance, and justice. According to legend, George Washington interpreted the elements of the flag this way: the stars were taken from the sky, the red from the British colors, and the white stripes signified the secession from the home country. However, there is no official designation or meaning for the colors of the flag.

Urban Legend

- **Is Texas's the only state flag allowed to fly at the same height as the US flag?**
- **No.** This is an urban legend. All state flags may fly at the same height as the U.S. flag. The U.S. flag must be on its right (the viewer's left), however. Texas's laws are consistent with those of the other states.
- **Does the ball ornament atop a flagpole contain a razor, lighter, and flare?**
- **No.** This is just an urban legend. One explanation is that the myth started during the Cold War and that the objects were to be used to destroy the flag in the event of a Soviet invasion. Of course, the ball ornament predates the Cold War by many years.
- **What does it mean if the flag is not flying at the White House?**
- An urban legend states that it only flies at the White House when the President is in town. According to Lonnie Hovey, Director of Preservation of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, "Unlike other countries where the flag flying or not flying signifies the monarch or president is in the residence, the American flag is always flying on top of the White House whether or not the President and First Family are at home."