



The Flag in Mourning

Americanism FLAG ETIQUETTE

Americanism Committee 2024 - 2025

Flag Etiquette Article 5

January 25, 2025

The Flag of the United States is a proud symbol of patriotism, but it can also be used to commemorate a time of mourning. Knowing when and how to fly the Flag in mourning is an important way to respect our country and the values it represents.

In times of mourning, we fly the Flag at half-staff. The term “half-staff” refers to a Flag positioned one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff. Half-staffing is reserved in most cases for mourning.

History

Half-staff is a tradition that goes back to the eighteenth century. The earliest documented occurrence was in 1799, when the Navy Department directed all ships to lower their Flags to half-staff upon the death of George Washington. The tradition has since expanded beyond the Navy. President Dwight D. Eisenhower formally codified the practice with a presidential proclamation in 1954 for all government buildings. The reason for this position is unknown, but it has nonetheless been an enduring custom for the Flag of the United States.

When to Half-Staff the Flag

The Flag is flown at half-staff to commemorate the death of principal figures of the United States government or the governor of a state or territory. The United States law gives the President of the United States authority to order a nation-wide half-staffing as a mark of respect for special events as well.

In addition to deaths of government figures, the Flag should also be flown half-staff for the following dates:

- Peace Officers Memorial Day (May 15)
- Memorial Day (Last Monday in May)
- Korean War Veterans Day (July 27)
- Patriot Day (September 11)
- National Firefighters Memorial Day (First Sunday in October)
- Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day (December 7)

Recommend that individuals and organizations find other ways to commemorate the deaths of loved ones, employees or officers rather than fly the Flag at half-staff. In general, stick to the parameters outlined above, as they are intended to be reserved for periods of national mourning.

For How Long?

- 30 days upon the death of the President or a former President.
- 10 days upon the death of the Vice President or the speaker of the House of Representatives.
- On the day of death and the following day for a member of Congress.
- Peace Officers Memorial Day: From sunrise to sunset.
- Memorial Day: From sunrise to noon.
- Korean War Veterans Day: From sunrise to sunset.
- Patriot Day: From sunrise to sunset.
- National Firefighters Memorial Day: From sunrise to sunset.
- Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day: From sunrise to sunset.

For Burial Ceremonies

When used to cover a casket, the Flag should be placed with the union over the head and left-shoulder. It should not be lowered in with the casket.

