

Etiquette rules outlined as Flag Day nears

By Jacob Puestow

As Flag Day approaches on Sunday, it's important to learn or brush up on flag etiquette to honor our nation's flag properly.

The United States Flag Code provides a detailed list of protocol on proper flag usage, when and how to fly it and its relationship with other flags.

The Flag Code can be found on the American Legion's website under the "Advocacy" tab.

Following is a summary of the major points of the code, not a full list.

While the flag code is a federal law, that doesn't mean people will be arrested for breaking any of the codes.

However, considering the value people attach to the flag, it's best to be considerate when using or displaying it and to know why things are done as they are.

The code considers the flag of the United States of America as a sentient entity.

"The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing," the code reads.

The level of expectation differs between how a private individual uses a flag and how government buildings or military personnel display it.

The flag code describes the "universal custom" to fly the flag on a stationary pole from sunrise to sunset in the open.

A flag may be flown all 24 hours of the day if properly illuminated in hours of darkness.

For public places, it should be displayed "daily on or near the main administration building of every public institution," also at every polling station during election days and in or near every schoolhouse for every school day.

If more than one flag is flown on the same pole—city, state, territory, etc.—the flag of the United States should always be above all others.

"No such flag or pennant may be placed above the flag of the United States or to the United States flag's right," reads the code.

However, if two or more flags of different countries are to be flown beside the United States flag, they should be displayed on separate poles at equal height and approximately equal size.

"International usage forbids the display of the flag of one nation above that of another nation in time of peace," according to the flag code.

The flag can be flown at half-staff in two scenarios. On a ship at sea, the term is "half-mast."

The first is on Memorial Day, where the flag should be at half-staff until noon that day, then raised back to the top.

Other instances are under the instruction of the President of the United States, typically in honor of a fallen prominent politician, a tragedy of national significance or other solemn occasion. Governors also have the authority to order flags to be flown at half-staff in their

states for similar reasons.

There are also protocols in the event of the death of someone in a higher position in the U.S. government.

"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," reads the U.S. Flag Code.

Because of the flag's prominence in public institutions and use in honoring the dead, it's expected that people show it great respect.

"No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America..." the code notes.

This applies to any damage done to the flag, as well as excessive brandishing.

It is recommended that the flag should not touch any merchandise, flooring, ground or water beneath it, and should not brandish any alteration such as a mark, symbol, lettering, etc.

As for its destruction, there is a proper way to dispose of a flag "when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display,"

via burning.

However, there is a sharp difference between an Unserviceable Flag Ceremony by a veterans organization—a topic on which the American Legion also has resources—and burning a flag in protest.

Though legal via the 1989 Supreme Court case *Texas v. Johnson*, flag burning remains a brash and controversial form of protest, often associated with a hatred of the United States.

More than its destruction, however, the U.S. Flag Code notes what some may consider excessive brandishing.

"The flag should never be used (for) wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery..." reads the code. "No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform."

The code prohibits the flag's use as clothing, decoration and in advertising, mainly because it would be easier for the flag to be "easily torn, soiled or damaged in any way."

There is also a protocol for how to view and approach the flag during the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance and a performance of the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner." People are also expected to remove their hats and stand with their hand over their heart in respect of the flag when the first one passes in a parade.

Again, any alterations or protests are legal but remain controversial, particularly in the current political climate.

For more information on the United States Flag Code, visit www.legion.org.



Old Glory

The U.S. Flag flies outside the Valders Village Office. Flag Day, traditionally observed on June 14, is this Sunday. Etiquette in the U.S. Flag Code calls for respect for the flag.

—Journal Photo by Jacob Puestow