

# **Policy for Flying the United States and District of Columbia Flags at Full and Half-Staff in Washington, DC**

There are many specific rules and regulations regarding the handling, display, and use of federal and state flags. This document applies Federal Government and Government of the District of Columbia policy to flying the federal and District Flags at full and half-staff on federal and District-owned buildings. Written guidelines help ensure that proper respect for the flag and its tradition are maintained.

## **PURPOSE:**

This document establishes policy and provides procedural guidance on flying the flag of the United States and the flag of the District of Columbia at full and half-staff at District of Columbia government facilities. The term “half-staff” means the position of the flag when it is one-half the distance between the top and the bottom of the pole on which it is flying. All District agencies shall display the United States and District of Columbia flags at half-staff at DC government facilities in accordance with this policy, when directed to do so.

## ***Symbolism of Half-Staff***

The placement of the flag at half-staff is one of the highest acts of respect that can be enacted to memorialize an individual or an event. Flying the flag at half-staff (on land) or half-mast (on water) is a gesture made to specific individuals, groups, or events that is a solemn act of great reverence. In order to preserve the dignity and significance of flying the flags of the United States and the District of Columbia at half-staff, it is necessary to have a policy that does not trivialize this tradition, but preserves it as a ceremonial act of great significance. This in no way reduces the significance of the passing of any individual or the memorializing of any event for which the flag is not lowered. The District’s written guidelines are designed to ensure that proper respect for the flag and this tradition are maintained – no matter what the circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

## **FEDERAL LAW RELATING TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES**

Laws relating to the flag of the United States of America are found in the Flag Code: Title 4, Chapter 1 of the United States Code.<sup>2</sup> These laws are frequently supplemented by Executive Orders and Presidential Proclamations.<sup>3</sup> The Flag Code is an important resource, but the White House may have updated information on any specific occasion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on the State of Georgia’s flag policy

<sup>2</sup> Flag Code can be read at: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/4/usc.sec.04.00000007~000/000/html>

<sup>3</sup> 4 USC 10.

## ***General Rules for Flying the Flag (excerpt from the Flag Code)***

1. The United States and District of Columbia flags shall be flown between sunrise and sunset seven days a week in Washington, D.C.
2. The flag may be flown 24 hours a day if it is properly illuminated during the hours of darkness.
3. The United States flag is flown on the right flag pole facing away from the building (the observer's left). The flag of the District of Columbia is flown from the left flag pole.
4. No flags should ever be placed above or to the right of the United States flag.
5. In all interior locations where both the U.S. and District flags are displayed, the U.S. flag shall always be on the observer's left (or what is known as the flag's own right).
6. The flag shall be raised briskly to the peak of the pole. The flag shall be lowered slowly and ceremoniously.
7. When flown at half-staff, the flag shall be first hoisted briskly to the peak for an instant and then lowered slowly and ceremoniously to the mid-way point on the staff. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day.
8. The flag must never touch the ground or anything else when being raised or lowered.
9. When the United States flag is lowered to half-staff position, the District of Columbia flag shall similarly be lowered.
10. Flags that are affixed to poles and cannot be half-staffed should show mourning by attaching a length of black streamer made of ribbon, crepe, or other material at the base of the pole's finial.
11. Illuminated flags, which are not traditionally raised and lowered each day, must be appropriately half-staffed when other flags are at half-staff.

### ***PROCESS FOR ORDERING THE FLAG TO HALF-STAFF***

Only the President of the United States can order the U.S. flag to half-staff (with the one exception that the Mayor of the District of Columbia can order the U.S. flag to half-staff when an active duty member of the U.S. military from the District of Columbia dies).

Only the Mayor of the District of Columbia can order the District flag to half-staff. As provided in 4 U.S.C. §7, any request to fly the U.S. Flag at half-staff in the District of Columbia must originate from the Mayor's Office.

## ***Procedure***

When an occasion arises that the President or Mayor determines merits an order to lower the flag to half-staff, the following procedure shall be enacted:

1. The Secretary of the District of Columbia shall send written notification with instructions, to the Department of General Services.
2. The Senior Facilities Manager then notifies all District agencies operating District facilities, of the designated time period during which the flags are to fly at half-staff. These include, but are not limited to, the Department of General Services, DC Public Schools, Metropolitan Police Department, DC FEMS, the Council of the District of Columbia, DC Housing Authority, Department of Corrections, and others.
3. When the order is initiated by the Mayor of the District of Columbia (as in the case of a military death), the Senior Facilities Manager notifies the federal Department of Homeland Security's Megacenter<sup>4</sup> via telephone (877-437-7411) of the Mayor's directive.
4. The telephone request must be accompanied by a follow-up order by e-mail to the Megacenter ([suitland.megacenter@dhs.gov](mailto:suitland.megacenter@dhs.gov)).

## ***Text of Order***

When ordering the District of Columbia flag flown at half-staff, it is suggested that the following wording be used in all messages sent:

By Order of the Mayor of the District of Columbia, all flags at District facilities shall be flown at half-staff from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ in memory (or honor) of \_\_\_\_\_.

## ***Specific Dates to Fly the Flag at Half-Staff***

There are four (4) days when the federal flag (and therefore the District flag) is required to be flown at half staff. They are:

1. **May 15**, Peace Officer Memorial Day (but not when Armed Forces Day also falls on May 15), Half-staff from Sunrise to Sunset.<sup>5</sup>
2. **September 11**, Patriot Day, Half-staff from Sunrise to Sunset.<sup>6</sup>
3. **December 7**, Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, Half-staff from Sunrise to Sunset.<sup>7</sup>
4. **Last Monday in May**, Memorial Day, Half-staff from Sunrise to Noon, and Full-staff from Noon to Sunset.<sup>8</sup> On Memorial Day, the flag is flown at half-staff until noon out

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.gas.gov/graphics/pbs/GSA\\_Flag\\_Policy\\_122107\\_w013108](http://www.gas.gov/graphics/pbs/GSA_Flag_Policy_122107_w013108)

<sup>5</sup> 4 USC 7m.

<sup>6</sup> 36 USC 144

<sup>7</sup> 36 USC 129

<sup>8</sup> 4 USC 7m.

of respect for veterans who have died, and at full-staff from noon until sunset because “the Nation lives.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Time Frames and Locations for Flying the Flag at Half-Staff***

Only the Mayor of the District of Columbia can issue an order to fly the District flag at half staff. When the President issues an order to fly the United States flag at half-staff, the Mayor supplements it with a directive to fly the District flag in a similar fashion.

District policy provides that District flags be flown at half-staff during periods of mourning designated by the President of the United States or the Mayor of the District of Columbia for many of the same reasons:

1. To commemorate the death of a service member on active duty whose residence or “home of record” is the District of Columbia;
2. to commemorate the death of a current or former public official;
3. to commemorate the death of a person of extraordinary national or District of Columbia standing; or
4. to commemorate a tragic event.

The Flag Code directs specific timeframes to fly the U.S. flag at half-staff when mourning the holders of specific offices. This document directs specific timeframes to fly the District flag at half-staff at District government facilities when mourning local officials.

<b>Official to be Memorialized</b>	<b>Federal Flag Code</b>	<b>District Flag Policy</b>
<b>President or Former President of the United States</b>	30 days from day of death	30 days from day of death
<b>Vice President or Former Vice President of the United States</b>	10 days from the day of death	10 days from the day of death
<b>Chief Justice or Retired Chief Justice of the United States</b>		
<b>Speaker of the House of Representatives</b>		
<b>Associate Justice of the Supreme Court</b>		From day of death until interment for all <i>except</i> :
<b>Secretary of an executive or military department</b>	From day of death until interment	
<b>Governor of a State, territory, or possession</b>		
<b>SITTING MAYOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA</b>		Sitting Mayor of the District of Columbia 7 days from the day of death
<b>Member of Congress</b>	Day of death and following day	Day of death and following day for all <i>except</i> :
<b>SITTING DELEGATE OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA</b>		Sitting DC Delegate: 7 days from the day of death

<sup>9</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs; Public and Intergovernmental Affairs.

<b>Official to be Memorialized</b>	<b>Federal Flag Code</b>	<b>District Flag Policy</b>
<b>Member of the Armed Forces from the District of Columbia who dies while serving on active duty</b>	As directed by the Mayor of the District of Columbia	As directed by the Mayor of the District of Columbia – usually the day of interment
<b>Sitting Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia</b>	N/A	7 days from the day of death
<b>Sitting Member of the Council of the District of Columbia</b>	N/A	5 days from the day of death
<b>Former Mayor of District of Columbia Former Chairman of the Council of the District of Columbia</b>	N/A	5 days from the day of death
<b>Former Delegate of the District of Columbia</b>	N/A	Day of death through interment
<b>Former member of the Council of the District of Columbia</b>	N/A	Day of death through interment
<b>Mayor-elect, Delegate-elect, or Council Chairman-elect</b>	N/A	Day of death and the following day
<b>Sitting Member of Cabinet of Mayor of District of Columbia</b>	N/A	As ordered by the Mayor of the District of Columbia
<b>Others designated by the President of the United States</b>	As ordered by the President of the United States	As ordered by the President of the United States
<b>Others designated by the Mayor of the District of Columbia</b>	N/A	As ordered by the Mayor of the District of Columbia