

Flag Retirement

"The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem of display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

-The United States Flag Code, Title 4, Section 8k



What is Flag Retirement?

Flag Retirement is the term used to define the proper, dignified way of destroying United States flags that are no longer fit to serve the nation.

How badly damaged does a flag need to be before it should be retired?

It is in the eye of the beholder to determine the condition of a flag. Often a flag only needs [cleaning](#) to restore its original appearance. Flags can machine-washed in cold water with a mild detergent. They should be laid flat or hung to dry. Never fold the flag when it is damp.

It is recommended that you mend a tattered flag at early signs of wear, if possible. The first part of a flag to show wear is usually the fly end, the outer edge of the flag, or seams that may have unraveled due to stress from the wind.

If the flag appears too tattered for repair, then the flag should be retired.

What is the preferred way to destroy old, worn, frayed and/or faded U.S. Flags?

The preferred way to destroy old, worn, frayed and/or faded U.S. Flags is by burning them.

Isn't burning the flag an act of desecration and a sign of rebellion?

No, throughout history, burning or cremation has long been considered a dignified way of paying respect to the deceased and to objects worthy of veneration. Burning has been applied to flag retirement to offer the most reverent method of final tribute.

Can anyone retire a U.S. Flag?

The Flag code does not authorize any particular organization with the duty of retiring unfit flags. Any one person or group can do it.

Where and how should a Flag Retirement ceremony be performed?

Flags should be retired in private at a non-public location and the ceremony should be a solemn, dignified event.

Is there an official ceremony for retiring flags?

No. There is no one official ceremony.

My municipality prohibits open fires and/or the burning of flags. What can I do?

If you live in such a community, you will need to find an organization that provides flag retirement services. Contact your local chapter, post or unit of such a community organization.

Another option is to separate the blue star field from the stripes and then to separate the stripes from each other. Once this is done the material is no longer a flag and the pieces may be respectfully interred as part of the ceremony.

Is it permissible to cut up the American flag?

Yes, some organizations even recommend cutting the flags into smaller pieces before placing them in the incinerator or on the fire. When doing this please keep the union of blue intact. Doing so symbolizes that the unity of our union should never be broken.

Precautions:

When burning flags made of synthetic fibers, be aware that they may burn quickly and emit noxious gases into the air. Handle such flags with care.

It is important the fire be sizable-preferably having burnt down to a bed of red hot coals to avoid bits of the flag being carried off by a roaring fire-yet be of sufficient intensity to ensure complete burning of the flag. Make sure the fire is safely extinguished before leaving the location.