

**EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To update National Cemetery Administration (NCA) emergency preparedness planning succession policy.
- 2. SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHANGE:** This change updates the list of successors to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (paragraph 6.b.(3)), and replaces page 6 in its entirety.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCA, Office of Finance and Planning, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the material contained in this directive. Questions should be directed to the NCA Emergency Preparedness Coordinator within the Policy and Planning Service.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVES AND HANDBOOKS:**
  - a. VA Directive and Handbook 0320, Emergency Preparedness Planning (10/18/1999);
  - b. VA Handbook 6300.2, Management of the Vital Records Program (1/12/1998);
  - c. NCA Handbook 0320, Emergency Preparedness Planning Procedures (July 13, 2004);  
and
  - d. NCA Directive and Handbook 3410, Pesticide Certification and Procedures (9/10/1998).
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** Paragraph 6.b.(3) of NCA Directive 0320/2, Emergency Preparedness Planning (April 9, 2007).

/s/  
William F. Tuerk  
Under Secretary  
for Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING

### 1. PURPOSE

This directive provides policy, direction, and general orientation to all management levels in the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) on emergency preparedness planning. New or additional NCA activities may be required to effectively coordinate emergency actions with other departments and agencies. The statutory authority for NCA implementing activities comes from 38 United States Code Sections 307, 2400(a), and 2404(a). Authority for the general emergency preparedness program comes from statutes, regulations, and guidance issued by Congress and those agencies tasked with actual and oversight responsibilities for emergency and security activities. Specific laws and other guidance are cited in the text where appropriate, and listed in paragraph 7, References.

### 2. SCOPE

a. This directive addresses emergency preparedness functions and procedures for NCA during national, local and cemetery emergencies (defined in paragraph 5). Preparedness functions and procedures include policies, plans, and readiness measures, including mitigation strategies, which enhance the ability of NCA to mobilize for, respond to, and recover from an emergency.

b. Emergency preparedness planning requires consideration of a variety of possible emergency contingencies which may affect the local community, the state, and/or NCA offices and cemeteries, including but not limited to:

(1) National Security Emergencies, such as;

(a) War involving the U.S. Armed Forces, including the threat thereof;

(b) Attack on the United States, including the threat thereof;

(c) Threat to the continuity of the Federal government;

(2) Natural and technological disasters, such as;

(a) Radiological accidents or emergencies;

(b) Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) accidents and environmental disasters;

(c) Events declared by the President to be major disasters or emergencies under Public Law 93-288, the Disaster Relief Act of 1974, as amended and renamed The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act by Public Law 100-707, The Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Amendments of 1988, codified as 42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq., and

(3) Civil disorders, terrorism or other violent acts.

### 3. POLICY

a. Effective emergency preparedness planning requires: identification of functions to be performed during an emergency; the development of plans for performing these functions; the development of the capability to implement the plans; and analysis of events to formulate mitigation strategies which would lessen the impact of future events.

b. Emergency plans and programs will be developed as an integral part of NCA's continuing activities.

c. The policy of NCA is to have sufficient capabilities in all Cemetery Directors and key program officials to meet essential needs during a national emergency, including the capability to respond to the needs of individuals and State and local governments as required by law, or other Federal or local agreements and/or plans. NCA key program officials include: Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs; Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs; NCA Chief of Staff; all Central Office (CO) and Memorial Service Network Directors; CO Division Chiefs; and all Memorial Programs Service (MPS) Processing Site Supervisors.

d. Certain records are considered "vital" to NCA and VA:

(1) Emergency Operating Records are vital to the essential functions of NCA for the duration of an emergency. They must be immediately available to key program officials as needed, at or in the vicinity of emergency operating centers, to ensure continuity of daily business operations. Examples for NCA include current operating budget plan, an inventory of available gravesites by cemetery, and list of key employees that could potentially be called to active duty.

(2) Rights and Interests Records are essential to the preservation of the legal and financial rights and interests of individuals and the U.S. Government. They are not needed immediately following an emergency, but have enduring value and should be maintained in accordance with vital records policy outlined in VA Handbook 6300.2, Management of the Vital Records Program. Examples for NCA include records of interment.

### 4. RESPONSIBILITIES

Emergency preparedness is a responsibility at every management level in NCA. All staff will be guided by the provisions of VA Directive and Handbook 0320, NCA Directive and Handbook 0320, and local emergency plans.

a. The **Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs** (hereafter referred to as the Under Secretary) will:

(1) Develop plans to support NCA's essential functions and meet potential increases in needs for NCA services in emergency situations;

(2) Ensure NCA capability to support emergency preparedness plans;

(3) Assist and support the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in discharging responsibilities under Executive Order 12656 (Assignment of Emergency Responsibilities);

(4) Serve in the line of succession to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, subject to the provisions of Presidential Executive Order 13247, as amended by Executive Order 13261.

(5) Ensure that all NCA offices and sites comply with the emergency preparedness policies of VA and NCA. During emergencies which affect NCA field offices, the Under Secretary will maintain communications with such offices and direct changes to normal workflow to ensure uninterrupted provision of NCA services. The Under Secretary or his or her designee will report emergency conditions and actions taken to the Secretary and the Readiness Operations Center.

b. The **Director, Policy and Planning Service**, will:

(1) Provide guidance and assistance to key program officials in the development of plans and procedures for:

(a) The emergency conduct of interment and memorialization operations at national cemeteries, and

(b) Participation with the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as provided for in interagency agreements (see VA Handbook 0320, Emergency Preparedness Planning Procedures);

(2) Develop policies, plans and procedures for the performance of emergency functions related to memorial affairs and national cemetery activities;

(3) Develop plans for the continuation or restoration of burial benefits to eligible decedents as soon as possible after an emergency and prepare interment operating plans and programs designed to inter and memorialize eligible decedents, including plans to handle a significant increase in burials resulting from a catastrophic event; and

(4) Designate an emergency planner (the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator) and Alternate Emergency Preparedness Coordinator(s) to have primary responsibility for planning and developing emergency procedures for NCA.

c. The **Emergency Preparedness Coordinator (EPC)** for NCA is located in Policy and Planning Service. The EPC will:

(1) Monitor and coordinate emergency preparedness planning within NCA, and between NCA and others;

(2) Maintain a list of essential personnel within NCA by occupation and skill that would be needed in the event of a national emergency, advise such personnel of their responsibilities on a periodic basis, and submit such list to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning and Preparedness, Office of Readiness and Emergency Preparedness, and VA Office of Administration, on an annual basis;

(3) Coordinate security clearance processes for NCA personnel to include monitoring status and level of security clearances.

(4) Ensure the selection, shipment, maintenance, and disposition of official NCA emergency operating records (Category A) to VA relocation site(s);

- (5) Conduct an annual review of the emergency records in place at the relocation site(s);
- (6) Conduct periodic tests of the NCA Emergency Alerting Network (cascade chart);
- (7) Represent NCA on the VA Crisis Response Team (CRT).

(8) Ensure that during an emergency situation the VA Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness and VA Office of Administration are notified of activated plans, given reports of status and completed actions, and, in the absence or incapacity of the Under Secretary, provide the name and title of the successor who is acting as the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

(9) Develop guidelines for evaluating cemetery emergency plans; and

(10) Review all cemetery emergency preparedness plans annually, and develop recommendations for improvements.

d. **Memorial Service Network (MSN) Directors** will serve as the Network Emergency Coordinators (NEC), and have responsibility for:

(1) Coordinating MSN and cemetery activities with the NCA Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and Office of Field Programs;

(2) Evaluating cemetery emergency plans;

(3) Identifying and recommending how NCA resources can best be used to assist other VA facilities in mitigating the effects of an emergency; and

(4) Coordinating MSN and cemetery participation with DOD, HHS, DHS, and FEMA.

e. Each **Cemetery Director** will be responsible for:

(1) The coordination, preparation, maintenance, and testing of the cemetery's emergency plan in coordination with local intergovernmental entities; and

(2) Coordinating participation with DOD, HHS, DHS, and FEMA through the MSN office.

f. In addition to the assignments specified in the preceding paragraphs, some **NCA key program officials** (as identified in paragraph 3.c. above) will engage in emergency planning as part of their normal responsibilities. For example:

(1) Budget and Finance Service is tasked with emergency funding, accounting and reimbursement from FEMA for assistance provided in Presidentially-declared disasters;

(2) Office of Construction Management will assist with damage surveys, emergency repairs and reconstruction, and preparedness of the physical plants; and

(3) MSN Directors and other responsible officials will address problems of emergency relief.

**NOTE:** *Each organizational element will retain responsibility for currently assigned normal functions which must be carried out in emergency situations. Each program office should take appropriate measures to protect and maintain its vital records, or copies thereof, for use during and after an emergency. All NCA organizations will conduct periodic tests of their emergency alerting procedures.*

g. VA's response to national catastrophic disasters, and participation under the Federal Response Plan, are coordinated by the Office of Policy, Planning and Preparedness.

## 5. NATIONAL, LOCAL AND CEMETERY EMERGENCIES

Emergencies are generally defined as any potentially dangerous situation resulting from fire, building collapse, explosion, disease epidemic involving or jeopardizing NCA personnel, energy shortage crisis (on a national or regional basis), flood, windstorm or other disaster directly affecting or threatening NCA offices and functions or an NCA cemetery or its operations, which are not related to civil defense or to those emergencies declared by the President to be major disasters for which NCA has a continuous support role.

a. A **national emergency** is any occurrence, including natural disaster, technological, or other emergency, that seriously degrades or seriously threatens the capability of NCA to meet its mandated responsibilities. A national emergency may be declared by the President or Congress as a result of various situations which constitute a major threat to national security. It may affect some or all NCA facilities and sites. The declaration may be predicated on an overseas war involving United States military forces, or a threatened or actual attack upon the United States. A state of national emergency will be assumed to exist if an attack or other catastrophe has rendered the seat of Government inoperative.

(1) The existing formal structure prescribed for NCA to execute its mission will be retained to the extent possible during a national emergency.

(2) The Secretary and/or designee will have overall responsibility for the activation and operation of the VA Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan. The activation may be as a result of a threat or actual attack upon the United States.

(3) In an overseas conflict involving U.S. Forces, the Under Secretary will address a potential increased workload in collaboration with DOD.

b. A **local emergency** may be declared for the community, geographic area or State in which an NCA facility or cemetery is located. The situation could involve only certain NCA sites and not others, or facilities and cemeteries located near the site of an emergency.

c. A **cemetery emergency** would be a situation which affects the cemetery directly, but not necessarily the surrounding community or any other NCA or VA facility.

## 6. SUCCESSION

### a. Applicability

(1) Succession to the NCA positions specified will take place only in an emergency, and only when the incumbent is unavailable or succession is directed by a higher authority. Communication within the line of succession will avoid conflict of authority. The process of succession will continue until the successor is relieved by the principal official (current highest ranking individual in NCA according to established lines of succession), someone higher than the successor in the order of succession, or by direction from a higher authority.

(2) The individual who succeeds to the office of a principal official shall promptly report that fact to the next higher management level by the most expeditious means of communication available; e.g., an individual succeeding the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs will report to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(3) Each successor designee (see paragraph 6.b.(3) below) should be familiar with the duties that would be performed in an emergency.

#### **b. Lists of Successors**

(1) Lists of successors to the Under Secretary, Deputy Under Secretary, NCA Office and Service Directors, and MSN Directors will be provided by the principal official (*see paragraph 6.a.(1)*) to the NCA EPC for inclusion in VA's Essential Records System. Lists of successors will be reviewed and updated annually by the EPC.

(2) A list of successors to the National Cemetery Director will be included in each cemetery's Emergency Plan.

(3) In the absence or incapacity of the Under Secretary during an emergency, command will pass to the incumbents who have been appointed by the Under Secretary to the positions listed, in the order indicated, if the incumbent is at a location with command capability:

- (a) Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs
- (b) Director, Office of Field Programs
- (c) Director, Office of Finance and Planning
- (d) Deputy Director, Office of Field Programs
- (e) Director, MSN, Philadelphia, PA
- (f) Director, MSN, Atlanta, GA

(4) Each Key Program Official will designate appropriate position(s) in order of priority to serve as his or her successor in the event of his or her absence or incapacity during an emergency.

(5) Each National Cemetery Director will designate appropriate position(s) in order of priority to serve as his or her successor in the event of his or her absence or incapacity during an emergency.

## **7. REFERENCES**

a. Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-288 \*), as amended and renamed The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act by Public Law 100-707; the Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Amendments of 1988, codified as 42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.

b. Executive Order 12148, Federal Emergency Management, July 20, 1979, as amended \*\*

c. Executive Order 12472, Assignment of National Security and Emergency Preparedness Telecommunications Functions, April 3, 1984, as amended \*\*

d. Executive Order 12656, Assignment of Emergency Responsibilities, November 18, 1988, as amended \*\*

e. Executive Order 12657, Federal Emergency Management Agency Assistance in Emergency Preparedness Planning at Commercial Nuclear Power Plants, November 18, 1988, as amended \*\*

f. Executive Order 13247, Providing an Order of Succession Within the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended

g. Federal Preparedness Circulars (FPC) issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) (available electronically at [http://www.fema.gov/library/libfpc\\_n.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/library/libfpc_n.shtm))

h. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1995 (Public Law 103-337 \*)

i. National Security Act of 1947 (Public Law 80-253), as amended

j. National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) Number 47, July 22, 1982, Emergency Mobilization Preparedness

k. The Federal Response Plan ([www.fema.gov/rrr/frp/](http://www.fema.gov/rrr/frp/))

l. Veterans Administration and Department of Defense Health Resources Sharing and Emergency Operations Act (Public Law 97-174 \*), May 4, 1982, as amended

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\* Available electronically at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

\*\* Available electronically at [http://www.archives.gov/federal\\_register/executive\\_orders/disposition\\_tables.html](http://www.archives.gov/federal_register/executive_orders/disposition_tables.html)

**NOTE:** Contact the NCA Emergency Preparedness Coordinator in the Policy and Planning Service for references not available electronically.