

VA NATIONAL CEMETERY
REDUCTION IN BURIAL SERVICES AND/OR CLOSURE

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To update the policy and procedures used by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to determine when and how a national cemetery will reduce or no longer provide burial services.

2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES: Changes include:

- a. Establishing the need for consistency between plans and statistical data;
- b. Adding a new responsibility for the Director, Communications Management Service; and
- c. Reformatting the timeline (Appendix A) for clarity.

NOTE: *New/revise information is indicated by a line in the left margin.*

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: National Cemetery Administration, Office of Field Programs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the information contained in this directive.

4. RELATED HANDBOOK: None.

5. RESCISSIONS: NCA Directive 3015 – VA National Cemetery Reduction in Burial Services and/or Closure, dated January 11, 2007, is rescinded in its entirety.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This publication is scheduled for recertification in March 2010.

/s/
Steve L. Muro
Acting Under Secretary
for Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

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1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

a. This directive updates the policy used by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to determine when and how a national cemetery will reduce or no longer provide burial services (interments). It identifies the offices responsible for ensuring that all alternatives are explored and advance notification is given to appropriate interested parties.

b. The statutory authority for this directive is title 38, United States Code, chapter 24.

2. POLICY

a. NCA is committed to providing burial benefits to as many veterans as possible by maximizing the use of available space in each national cemetery. NCA uses a variety of burial options: casket gravesite, oversized casket gravesite, casket with private vault, cremains in ground, cremains in columbaria, cremains in private vault, scattering gardens, and memorialized without remains. As these options are used, cemeteries may become unable to provide certain burial options, and eventually may be closed to new burials (subsequent family member burials may still be possible).

b. The Office of Finance and Planning produces an annual Master List of VA national cemeteries projected to deplete first-interment gravesites within the next ten years. Cemetery and Memorial Service Network (MSN) Directors use this information, plus data collected and reported in the NCA Management and Decision Support System (MADSS) and verified by actual physical assessment, to determine when a VA national cemetery will reduce services or no longer provide first interments within the next five years. At that time, the following actions will take place:

(1) The Cemetery Director will notify the MSN Director and the Director, Office of Field Programs, that the cemetery will reduce services and/or close within five years;

(2) A review and written evaluation will be submitted by the MSN Director to the Director, Office of Field Programs, within 30 days to determine if alternative or additional burial options can be made available; and

(3) A full Five-Year Burial Service Reduction/Closure and Notification Plan (referred to as the "R/C Plan") will be developed by the Cemetery and MSN Director within 60 days. The R/C Plan should include gravesite usage, burial space remaining, any Adjacent Gravesite Set-Asides (AGS) or gravesite reservations, alternatives considered for additional burials, impacts of burial options considered, recommendations for future actions, and a draft timeline for actions and required notifications, including the need for gravesite expansion or land purchase. (The budget formulation cycle requires approximately two years lead time for funding purposes.) The R/C Plan should be updated on an as-needed basis when any information changes, so that it is maintained in a current status. (Extensions to the initial 60-day submission deadline may be granted in writing by the Director, Office of Field Programs.)

(a) The R/C Plan should be consistent with data presented in the annual Statistical Summary prepared by the Office of Finance and Planning and the annual MADSS certification process.

(b) The Cemetery Director and MSN Director will, through the Director, Office of Field Programs, notify the Office of Finance and Planning, of any deviations from information contained in the summary and certifications.

c. When it has been determined that certain burial options will no longer be available, or the cemetery will be closed to new burials, the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA) will notify the Secretary of VA at least 270 days (9 months) prior to selected date. NCA will then provide notification at least 180 days (6 months) prior to the effective date of reduction or closure to the appropriate Congressional offices, State and local officials, Veterans Service Organizations, funeral homes, the public, and any other interested parties. The notification letters will be signed by the USMA.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

NOTE: *Appendix A contains a timeline that summarizes who should take what action at what point in time.*

a. **Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs** is responsible for:

- (1) Making the final determination when a VA national cemetery will reduce services or be closed to new burials;
- (2) Notifying the Secretary of VA before any other notifications are made; and
- (3) Signing formal notification correspondence.

b. **Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs** is responsible for ensuring that:

- (1) Staff office responsibilities related to planning, budgeting, and program evaluation are coordinated and completed prior to Under Secretary determination; and
- (2) All prepared materials articulate VA and NCA goals and objectives.

c. **Director, Office of Finance and Planning**, is responsible for:

- (1) Annually creating a Master List of VA national cemeteries projected to reduce services or close to first interments within the next ten years based on gravesite, acreage, and interment data reported in MADSS;
- (2) Providing copies of the Master List to key NCA management officials; and
- (3) Formulating NCA's budget proposals, which will include funding requests for expansion needs identified in the R/C Plan(s) and shown in NCA's Five-Year Facility Plan.

d. **Director, Office of Construction Management**, is responsible for:

(1) Providing accurate and up-to-date information on the number of developed and undeveloped acres in the cemeteries on the Master List; and

(2) Preparing/updating NCA's Five-Year Facility Plan annually, based on submissions by Memorial Service Network Directors that include needs identified in R/C Plan(s).

e. **Director, Communications Management Service**, is responsible for:

(1) Working with Office of Field Programs, MSN, and cemetery staff to:

(a) Create a contact list (including mailing addresses) of current Federal, State, and local officials, funeral homes, volunteer organizations, Veterans Service Organization leaders, and other interested parties to be notified of a service reduction or closure at a particular national cemetery; and

(b) Use draft(s) or template provided by Office of Field Programs to create final official correspondence for signature by the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs and distribution to appropriate officials and interested parties 180 days in advance of proposed reduction/closure;

(2) Coordinating all public relations contacts with VA Office of Public Affairs Central Office and field offices, and develop appropriate news releases for distribution to the news media; and

(3) Working with VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs to notify appropriate Congressional members.

f. **Director, Office of Field Programs**, is responsible for:

(1) Working with MSN Directors during the first quarter of each fiscal year to review and validate the information about cemeteries on the Master List projected to reduce services or close to new burials within the next five years;

(2) Reviewing and approving each cemetery R/C Plan and any subsequent revisions submitted by MSN Directors;

(3) Approving/disapproving, in writing, requests for extension to the 60-day R/C Plan submission deadline;

(4) Notifying all NCA key management officials at least 270 days (9 months) in advance of any proposed cemetery reduction in services and/or closure to ensure that all appropriate actions are accomplished in a timely manner; and

(5) Helping the Director, Communications Management Service, develop a contact list of appropriate officials and other interested parties that should be notified.

g. **Memorial Service Network (MSN) Directors** are responsible for:

(1) Ensuring all data on the Master List are accurate by:

- (a) Validating current MADSS data on gravesite usage and available gravespace;
 - (b) Validating developed and undeveloped acreage during the first quarter of each fiscal year; and
 - (c) Reviewing interment rates to verify that the projected date for reduction/closure is accurate;
- (2) Notifying the Director, Office of Field Programs, immediately if a cemetery is projected to reduce services or close earlier than reported during the last Master List annual update;
 - (3) Notifying the Director, Office of Field Programs, and the Director, Policy and Planning Service, of any changes to gravesite data reported in MADSS;
 - (4) Confirming the use of any AGS or reserved gravesite with Director, Office of Field Programs;
 - (5) Developing an R/C Plan for each national cemetery in their MSN that has been identified on the master list as subject to potential reduction of services or closure, and keeping those plans updated on an as-needed basis;
 - (6) Ensuring needs reflected in the cemetery R/C Plan are:
 - (a) Identified to allow sufficient time to request funding as part of VA's annual budget formulation process prior to the actual closure or reduction in services; and
 - (b) Included in annual updates to the Five-Year Facility Plan submitted to the Director, Office of Construction Management;
 - (7) Recommending service alternatives for consideration and approval by the Director, Office of Field Programs;
 - (8) Notifying the Director, Office of Field Programs, at least 275 days (9 months and 5 days) in advance of definite reduction/closure;
 - (9) Providing appropriate materials and information at least 240 days (8 months) in advance of definite reduction/closure to assist Communications Management Service staff in preparing materials and ensuring appropriate officials and interested parties are notified at least 180 days (6 months) in advance of proposed reduction/closure; and
 - (10) Helping the Director, Communications Management Service, develop a contact list of appropriate officials and other interested parties that should be notified.

h. **Cemetery Directors** are responsible for:

- (1) Conducting an on-site review and evaluation as cemeteries are placed on the Master List to determine if additional gravesites can be made available by:
 - (a) Using previously obstructed gravesites;

- (b) Extending sections by adding rows;
- (c) Using AGS or reserved gravesite(s), if approved by the MSN office;
- (d) Renovating or developing areas originally not considered for burial purposes; or
- (e) Identifying new property for burial use;

NOTE: *Alternatives for providing additional gravesites should be evaluated with respect to the NCA national shrine commitment, maintenance requirements, public access, possible future expansion, historical considerations, environmental impacts, and any other aspect of the cemetery that may be affected by an alternative under consideration.*

- (2) Discussing identified alternatives for extending service(s) with the MSN Director;
- (3) Assisting the MSN Director in developing an R/C Plan based on the review/evaluation conducted, and data for burial site usage, available gravesite space, and proposing alternative burial options with identified impacts;
- (4) Identifying needs for the R/C Plan to allow sufficient time to request funding as part of VA's annual budget formulation process prior to the actual closure or reduction in services;
- (5) Ensuring that gravesite and acreage data are accurate and current in MADSS, notifying the MSN Director of any changes to gravesite data reported in MADSS, providing accurate and reliable information on the annual gravesite availability certifications; and
- (6) Helping the Director, Communications Management Service, develop a contact list of appropriate officials and other interested parties that should be notified.

4. REFERENCES

- a. NCA Directive and Handbook 3120 – Interment Area Layout
- b. NCA Handbook 3140 - Management and Decision Support System Procedures *

* Available electronically to NCA staff at <http://vaww.nca.va.gov/> (choose "Legislative & Regulatory," "NCA Directives and Handbooks")

APPENDIX A – REDUCTION/CLOSURE TIMELINE & RESPONSIBILITIES

The Director, Office of Finance and Planning:

- maintains a Master List of VA national cemeteries projected to reduce burial services or close to first interments within 10 years;
- provides updated annual copies of the Master List to key NCA management officials; and
- formulates related budget proposals as appropriate (*budget cycle requires approximately two years advance time for funding purposes*).

WHEN A CEMETERY IS WITHIN 5 YEARS OF PROJECTED REDUCTION/CLOSURE		
MADSS data is verified by physical assessment	Cemetery Director	Notifies MSN Director and Director, Field Programs
No more than 30 days after notification	MSN Director	Submits review and written evaluation of alternative or additional burial options (if applicable) to Director, Field Programs
No more than 60 days after notification	MSN Director and Cemetery Director	Submit a Five-Year Burial Service Reduction/Closure and Notification (“R/C”) Plan to Director, Field Programs
ONCE TENTATIVE REDUCTION IN SERVICES/CLOSURE DATE IS SELECTED		
During the first quarter of each following Fiscal Year	Director, Office of Field Programs	- Works with MSN Director to update Master List by reviewing/validating MADSS data - Reviews/approves R/C Plan for each cemetery on the Master List
	MSN Director	- Works with Director, Field Programs, to update Master List by reviewing/validating MADSS data (notifies Director, Field Programs and Director, Finance & Planning, of any changes to MADSS) - Works with Cemetery Director to develop an R/C Plan for each MSN cemetery on the Master List - Notifies Director, Field Programs, immediately if a cemetery is projected to close/reduce services earlier than reported during the last Master List annual update
As needed	Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs	Makes final determination related to reducing services/ closing cemetery
STARTING 9 MONTHS 5 DAYS BEFORE SELECTED DATE		
275 days (9 months 5 days) prior to selected date	MSN Director	Notifies Director, Field Programs, of definite closure/ reduction in services date
270 days (9 months) prior to selected date	Director, Office of Field Programs	Notifies USMA and NCA key management officials of tentative date for closure/reduction in services; assist Communications Management in developing a contact list
	Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs	Confirms determination to close cemetery or reduce services on selected date and notifies the Secretary of VA before any other notifications are made
240 days (8 months) prior to selected date	MSN Director and Cemetery Director	Assists Communications Management Service staff to create contact list and prepare materials to ensure appropriate officials/interested parties are notified at least 6 months in advance of proposed reduction/closure
	Director, Communications Management Service	Works with Field Programs, MSN, and cemetery staff to create contact list of interested parties; uses Field Programs input as basis for USMA correspondence; begins preparation with VA Office of Public Affairs (OPA) and Office of Congressional & Legislative Affairs (OCLA) for public affairs/congressional relations activities
180 days (6 months) prior to selected date	Director, Communications Management Service	Distributes USMA correspondence to appropriate officials and interested parties; coordinates public affairs/ congressional relations activities/contacts with OPA & OCLA