

**VA NATIONAL CEMETERY
REDUCTION IN BURIAL SERVICES AND/OR CLOSURE**

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To update policy and procedures used by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to reduce burial services and/or close a VA national cemetery to first interments. These procedures start after NCA has made certain decisions regarding the future operational status of the cemetery in accordance with NCA Directive 3001, Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement (October 19, 2020).

2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES: Changes include:

a. Improving policy and procedures that assign responsibilities for planning and executing the reduction of burial services or closure at a national cemetery and communicating the reduction or closure to external stakeholders.

b. Revising timelines to allow for adequate preparation and execution of each Reduction/Closure and Notification Plan (R/C Plan).

c. Specifically directing that each R/C Plan include a communications plan.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: National Cemetery Administration, Office of Field Programs and Cemetery Operations (41), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the information contained in this directive. Questions may be referred to the Office of Field Programs and Cemetery Operations.

4. RELATED PUBLICATIONS: NCA Directive 3001, Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement (October 19, 2020).

5. RESCISSIONS: NCA Directive 3015 – VA National Cemetery Reduction in Burial Services and/or Closure, dated March 16, 2010.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This publication is scheduled for recertification on or before the last day of February 2028.

/s/
Matthew T. Quinn
Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

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1. PURPOSE/AUTHORITY:

a. This directive contains updated policy and procedures used by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to reduce burial services and/or close a national cemetery.

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

2. BACKGROUND:

a. Policies in this directive relate to information in NCA Directive 3001, Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement. Directive 3001 requires the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA) to decide whether to replace or expand the cemetery approximately 15 years before a cemetery is expected to deplete burial options. If the decision is to reduce one or more burial options, replace, expand on non-contiguous land, or close the cemetery, Directive 3015 assigns responsibilities and defines procedures for reducing burial options or closing the cemetery.

b. This Directive 3015 clarifies that NCA Cemetery Operations employees will initiate reduction and closure planning 10 years before an expected reduction or closure and will annually review depletion of burial options leading up to a cemetery's eventual depletion at the cemetery. Employees responsible for developing the reduction and closure plan must explore all alternatives to optimize cemetery space, before reduction or closure, and professionally execute that plan with advanced awareness for key stakeholders.

c. Throughout the period that each national cemetery is open to interment, NCA strives to make the best decisions to optimize burial access. Cemetery and district leadership expand burial access within their capabilities. When necessary, cemeteries and districts work with NCA Design and Construction Service and VA Construction and Facility Management leadership to expand within existing property boundaries. NCA Cemetery Development and Improvement Service initiates land acquisition processes in support of contiguous expansion, when feasible. Despite this work to keep a cemetery open, absent unlimited contiguous land for expansion, utilization of gravesites will eventually cause a VA national cemetery to reduce burial options and close to first interments.

d. A well-executed Reduction/Closure and Notification Plan (R/C Plan) ensures the highest regard for Veterans and their families served by the cemetery. Even if a Veterans community will continue to be served by another national cemetery or a State cemetery upon closure, the community will expect that NCA optimally utilized cemetery

space prior to closure. The R/C Plan also informs key external stakeholders of the cemetery's planned and actual change in status.

2. POLICY

a. It is NCA policy to provide burial access to as many eligible decedents as possible by optimizing burial access in each cemetery.

b. When 10 years remain before an expected reduction of a burial option(s) and/or closure of a cemetery, NCA District leaders will create an Initial R/C Plan that emphasizes development of all reasonable alternatives to prolong the cemetery's ability to provide burial access while working to balance the timing of the depletion across burial option types. NCA Central Office senior leaders will collaboratively evaluate the Initial R/C Plan for feasibility, ensuring thorough consideration of historical impacts, environmental impacts, and any other important considerations prior to submitting a Final R/C Plan to the USMA for approval. Once approved, the final R/C Plan serves as a "roadmap" for execution and external communication upon development of the communications plan.

c. The R/C Plan includes historic and projected gravesite usage rates; availability of burial space by type; depletion projections by burial type; and assessment of options to optimize the cemetery's service life by augmenting its existing layout and space. Such augmentations may include, but are not limited to, creating columbarium where there have been none before and/or removing infrastructure that will not be needed once the cemetery is closed.

d. In assessing options for optimizing existing cemetery capacity, District and Cemetery leadership will consider the following:

(1) Use of previously obstructed gravesites;

(2) Extension of sections by adding rows or columns;

(3) Use of AGS or reserved gravesite(s), if approved by the District Executive Director; and,

(4) Renovation or development of areas originally not considered for burial purposes.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs (USMA)** is responsible for:

(1) Approving the Final R/C Plan.

(2) Notifying the VA Secretary before NCA communicates reduction or closure to key stakeholders; and

(3) Signing formal notification correspondence as described in the Final R/C Plan.

b. Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations (41) is responsible for:

(1) Presenting the NCA leadership-coordinated proposed Final R/C Plan to the USMA when the cemetery has nine years remaining before an expected reduction or closure;

(2) Leading collaborative dialogue with the other Deputy Under Secretaries, and the Executive Director, Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovation (OEMI), to develop the proposed Final R/C Plan;

(3) Making a recommendation to the USMA and presenting alternative viewpoints if consensus is not reached by NCA leadership on the Final R/C Plan;

(4) Create official correspondence for signature by the USMA and distribution to appropriate stakeholders and other interested parties as identified in the communications plan, to include, but not limited to, the 180-day final notification of expected reduction/closure;

(5) Validating in the 3rd quarter of each fiscal year that there is an approved R/C Plan, (or one in development) for every cemetery that requires one and that all plans are recertified annually; and

(6) Approving variances from the timelines established in this directive on a case-by-case basis with sufficient justification.

c. Deputy Under Secretary for Finance and Planning (42) is responsible for:

(1) Evaluating the proposed Initial R/C Plan provided by the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery; and

(2) Concurring on the proposed Final R/C Plan after collaborating on its development prior to submission to the USMA.

d. Deputy Under Secretary for Management (43) is responsible for:

(1) Evaluating the proposed Initial R/C Plan provided by the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations across Management functional responsibilities; and

(2) Concurring with the proposed Final R/C Plan after collaborating on its development prior to submission to the USMA.

e. Executive Director, OEMI (44) is responsible for:

(1) Evaluating the proposed Initial R/C Plan provided by the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations across OEMI functional responsibilities; and

(2) Concurring with the proposed Final R/C Plan after collaborating on its development prior to submission to the USMA.

f. Executive Director, Cemetery Operations (41A), is responsible for:

(1) Providing guidance to the District Executive Directors as they begin development of the Initial R/C Plan;

(2) Reviewing the Initial R/C Plan submitted by the District Executive Director and presenting it to the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations no later than nine years and six months prior to expected reduction/closure; and

(3) Supporting the Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations in transforming the Initial R/C Plan to the proposed Final R/C Plan.

(4) Providing the USMA-approved Final R/C Plan to the District Director.

(5) Conducting annual reviews of all active, open plans with the District Executive Directors to validate planning assumptions and associated approaches, update depletion projects, identify and incorporate required plan adjustments, and confirm progress on planned actions.

(6) Notifying all NCA key management officials, including the USMA, one year in advance of an expected cemetery reduction in services and/or closure.

(7) Coordinating with District Executive Director(s) and NCA's Director, Communication and Outreach Service, following the notification of a reduction/closure within one year to achieve timely execution of planning actions for the 180-day final stakeholder notice and other notifications found in the Final R/C plan.

(8) Confirming that the USMA has notified the Secretary of the pending reduction/closure prior to initiating stakeholder communications.

g. Director, Budget Service (42B) is responsible for formulating NCA's budget proposals, which may include funding requests for construction projects identified in Final R/C Plan(s).

h. Director, Design and Construction Service (43B) is responsible for:

(1) Advising District Executive Directors or their staff as the subject matter expert on NCA design guidelines as requested.

(2) Ensuring that any required projects are properly managed through the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process to avoid depletion after the Final R/C Plan is approved by the USMA.

i. Chief, Communication, Public Affairs and Outreach (44A) is responsible for:

(1) Providing communications expertise, advice and support to the Executive Director, Cemetery Operations, and the District Executive Directors in developing a communications plan following notification of reduction/closure within one year to achieve NCA's long standing 180-day final notification of proposed reduction/closure to key stakeholders.

(2) Coordinating all public relations contacts with VA Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs concerning NCA's approved communication plan.

(3) Sharing key communication messages with NCA's Congressional and Correspondence Service.

j. Director, NCA Congressional and Correspondence Service (40A2A) is responsible for congressional notifications in accordance with the Final R/C communication plan.

k. District Executive Directors are responsible for:

(1) Developing and providing to the Executive Director, Cemetery Operations, an Initial R/C Plan when a cemetery is 10 years from projected depletion of a burial option and/or closure.

(2) Submitting projects through the SCIP process and managing any district level construction to execute the Final R/C Plan approved by the USMA.

(3) Conducting annual reviews of all active, open plans with Executive Director, Cemetery Operations, to validate planning assumptions and associated approaches, update depletion projects, identify and incorporate required plan adjustments, and confirm progress on planned actions.

(4) Notifying the Executive Director, Cemetery Operations, one year in advance of expected reduction/closure;

(5) Contributing to the development of a communications plan at least 270 days (9 months) in advance of expected reduction/closure to assist NCA's Communications and

Outreach Service staff in preparing materials and developing contact lists to ensure appropriate stakeholders and other interested parties are notified at least 180 days (6 months) in advance of final reduction/closure.

I. **Cemetery Directors** are responsible for conducting on-site evaluation to assist the Executive District Director developing the Initial R/C Plan by identifying gravesites that may be made available or newly established.

4. REFERENCES

- a. NCA Directive 3120 – Interment Area Layout and 41-SOP-022 - Interment Area Layout.
- b. NCA Directive 3001- Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Establishment, Expansion, and Replacement (October 19, 2020).