

FLORAL POLICY IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Directive revises and replaces existing National Cemetery Administration (NCA) floral policy Letters, Notices, Memoranda, Manuals, and other related documents with a unified floral policy for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENT: This Directive makes the following changes to NCA floral policy:

- a. Changes standardized dates for the placement of artificial flowers and permits Cemetery Directors to establish placement dates based upon the operational requirements for ground maintenance activities and/or the growing season.
- b. Updates responsibilities for NCA personnel.
- c. Updates and consolidates floral policy.
- d. Updates the list of permissible and prohibited items for gravesite placement.
- e. Clarifies policy regarding the custody, removal, and final disposition of floral and other personal items placed at gravesites or other areas within a VA national cemetery.
- f. Provides definitions of terms related to gravesite floral policy.
- g. Establishes policy regarding floral items for columbaria.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: National Cemetery Administration, Executive Director, Cemetery Operations (41A), 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Please submit any questions through the NCA Cemetery Operations mailbox at ncacemeteryoperations@va.gov.

4. RELATED PUBLICATION: NCA Operational Standards and Measures, July 1, 2014.

5. RESCISSIONS:

- a. Veterans Administration, Department of Memorial Affairs, National Cemeteries. Administration, Operation and Maintenance. M40-2, Chapter 3, subparagraphs 3.07 and 3.08; figures 3-2; and 3-2a, May 1, 1984.
- b. Veterans Administration, Department of Memorial Affairs, National Cemeteries. Administration, Operation and Maintenance. M40-2, Chapter 7, subparagraphs 7.02 and 7.06, May 1, 1984.

c. Veterans Administration. Department of Memorial Affairs, National Cemeteries. Administration, Operation and Maintenance. M40-2, Chapter 13, subparagraph 13.02, May 1, 1984.

d. Veterans Administration. Department of Memorial Affairs, National Cemeteries. Administration, Operation and Maintenance. M40-2, Chapter 22, subchapter 22.13 (4)(a), June 1, 1987.

e. 401 Policy Letter, *Revision of Policy for Holding Floral Items*, November 20, 1996.

f. 401A Memorandum, (NCA 2003—401-05), *Removal of Unauthorized Items from Columbaria and Graves*, May 21, 2003.

6. RECERTIFICATION: This publication is scheduled for recertification December 2024.

/s/ Ronald E. Walters
Principal Deputy Under Secretary
for Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

FLORAL POLICY IN VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES**1. PURPOSE/AUTHORITY:**

a. The purpose of this National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Directive is to revise existing and establish new NCA policy and procedures for the placement of floral arrangements, and the removal, storage, and disposition of floral and personal items placed at gravesites in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries. The policy will assist NCA national cemetery staff in fulfilling the mission to maintain its cemeteries as national shrines dedicated to honoring the memory of those who served in the Armed Forces.

b. Among the provisions in this directive is the requirement that cemetery directors dispose of personal property left at gravesites. Authority for this provision is found in the Federal Management Regulation (FMR) regarding the disposition of seized, forfeited, voluntarily abandoned, and unclaimed personal property in title 41 Code of Federal Regulations Chapter 102-41. Specifically, section 102-41.85(b) provides that an agency may retain or dispose of voluntarily abandoned personal property, including destroying the property without public notice when the estimated resale value of the property is less than \$500. Floral and personal items left at gravesites generally cost less than \$500.

2. POLICY: It is NCA policy that each national cemetery will allow visitors to place floral arrangements and other seasonal items on gravesites to commemorate and honor those interred while balancing NCA requirements to operate and maintain cemeteries as national shrines and to provide a safe environment for visitors and employees.

Note: This policy does not apply to flags left at gravesites. The authorized placement of gravesite flags is addressed separately in NCA Directive 3220 — Flag Displays in National Cemeteries.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. **Executive Director of Cemetery Operations** is responsible for:

- (1) Establishing floral policy for VA national cemeteries.
- (2) Consulting with District Executive Directors concerning any variance not explicitly covered in this Directive.

b. **District Executive Directors** are responsible for:

- (1) Enforcing NCA policy in accordance with this Directive at cemeteries within the District.
- (2) Ensuring each cemetery has a standard operating procedure (SOP) for implementing the policies in this Directive.

(3) Consulting with the Executive Director, Cemetery Operations concerning any variance not explicitly covered in this Directive.

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

- (1) Enforcing NCA policy in accordance with this Directive.
- (2) Establishing and maintaining an SOP consistent with the policies in this Directive.
- (3) Establishing the period when artificial flowers are permitted.
- (4) Establishing local floral pick-up schedules.
- (5) Posting the floral policy at the cemetery in public or conspicuous areas.
- (6) Posting the floral policy on the cemetery’s public-facing website.
- (7) Supervising and training cemetery personnel on the appropriate display of permissible floral arrangements and other seasonal items within the cemetery in accordance with this Directive and the local SOP.
- (8) Maintaining an adequate supply of approved cemetery-provided floral containers that are clean and in good repair for visitor use.
- (9) Providing bins that are well marked, clean, and in good repair for adequately storing cemetery-provided vases to prevent the spread of insect-borne diseases.
- (10) Establishing an inconspicuous area for temporary storage of items retrieved from gravesites.
- (11) Removing, holding, and disposing of floral and other items left at gravesites in accordance with this Directive.
- (12) Consulting with the District Executive Director concerning any variance not explicitly covered in this Directive.

4. AUTHORIZED ITEMS:

a. The following floral and seasonal items are permitted for placement at gravesites and memorial walls and sections in VA national cemeteries at designated times and subject to the specified conditions.

ITEM	ALLOWABLE TIME	CONDITIONS/PLACEMENT
Fresh cut floral arrangements	Allowable any time of year.	Visitors will use cemetery-supplied floral containers. Fresh or artificial floral arrangements placed at gravesites will be no taller than
Artificial floral arrangements	Allowable time period established by the Cemetery Director based on operational	

	<p>requirements for grounds maintenance activities.</p> <p>At a minimum, cemeteries will allow artificial floral arrangements five days before and after Memorial Day.</p>	<p>24 inches, and will not completely cover the headstone or marker, or encroach upon the adjacent gravesite.</p> <p>On the day of interment, fresh cut flowers and sprays may be placed at or on gravesites without the use of cemetery-supplied floral containers. Cemetery Directors may exercise discretion in the timing of the removal of these items with appropriate sensitivity to the families and visitors.</p> <p>At columbaria, visitors may place floral arrangements at the bottom of a niche column. To ensure space for other visitors, floral arrangements will be limited to one per niche.</p>
Wreaths and grave blankets	Allowable during December and January.	Grave blankets must be no larger than 2 feet by 3 feet.

5. PROHIBITED ITEMS:

a. The following items are prohibited for placement at gravesites and memorial walls and sections in VA national cemeteries. If such items are left at gravesites, cemetery personnel will consider these items voluntarily abandoned property and will remove them upon discovery with appropriate sensitivity to the families and visitors.

CEMETERY STANDARD	PROHIBITED ITEM
To preserve the dignity and appearance of the cemetery:	<p>Balloons, pinwheels, wind chimes, lights, statues, stuffed animals, alcoholic products, or other similar items.</p> <p>Offensive items or those deemed inconsistent with the cemetery setting.</p> <p>Permanent, in-ground plantings.</p> <p>Non-government supplied floral containers (e.g., pots, planter, vases, etc.).</p> <p>Permanent in-ground floral containers (applies to all cemeteries established after 1973).</p>

<p>To maintain a safe environment for visitors and staff:</p>	<p>Breakable items of any kind, such as vigil lights, glass vases, or decorative glass or plastic items.</p> <p>Candles, explosives, weapons of any kind, or ammunition.</p> <p>Any objects that could become projectiles when caught in grounds maintenance equipment, such as rocks, coins, or other small durable objects.</p> <p>*Note: Placement of rocks and coins on a gravesite may reflect religious and/or military traditions. Cemetery Directors may exercise discretion in the timing of the removal of these items with appropriate sensitivity to the families and visitors.</p>
<p>To preserve the appearance and facilitate maintenance of government-furnished headstones and markers:</p>	<p>Any object placed on or attached to headstones, markers, or niche covers.</p>

6. REMOVAL, HOLDING, AND DISPOSAL OF FLORAL ITEMS:

a. Floral and other items placed in a VA national cemetery are under the custodianship of VA and are therefore governed by rules for disposal of Federal property. Cemetery personnel will remove, hold, and dispose of items left at gravesites as outlined below that are in violation of the conditions stated in this Directive.

b. Removal:

(1) Cemetery personnel or contractors will remove floral arrangements and other personal items from gravesites in accordance with floral pick-up schedules established by the cemetery and when conducting grounds maintenance activities.

(2) Fresh floral and artificial arrangements, wreaths, and grave blankets placed at gravesites will be removed in accordance with the cemetery’s pick-up schedule, or when they become withered, faded, or unsightly.

(3) Prohibited items will be removed upon discovery with appropriate sensitivity to the families and visitors.

c. **Holding:** As a courtesy, personal items, removed prohibited items and artificial floral arrangements that are in good condition will be stored in an inconspicuous holding area for a period of not less than 30 days. During that time cemetery personnel will assist families who request to retrieve those personal items.

d. **Disposal:** Items that are not in good condition will not be placed in the holding area but will be disposed of immediately without notice. Personal items removed from gravesites which are not retrieved during the 30-day holding period may be disposed of

consistent with the rules governing the disposal of Federal property. Cash found at gravesites will be deposited into the cemetery's general gift fund.

7. REFERENCES:

- a. Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (40 U.S.C. ch. 1 § 101, et seq.).
- b. 41 C.F.R. §102-41.85, Voluntarily Abandoned Personal Property.
- c. 41 C.F.R. §102-41.125, Disposition of Seized, Forfeited, Voluntarily Abandoned, And Unclaimed Personal Property.
- d. NCA Operational Standards and Measures, Version 5.1, July 1, 2014.
- e. VA Handbook 7345, Sale, Abandonment, or Destruction of Personal Property, March 8, 1996.
- f. 38 C.F.R. §1.218, Security and Law Enforcement at VA Facilities.

8. DEFINITIONS:

- a. **Floral Arrangement**: Floral and plant matter, real or artificial, and the container used to hold those items.
- b. **Floral Container**: Containers provided by a VA national cemetery to hold floral arrangements.
- c. **Grave Blanket**: A blanket of intertwined branches or man-made material in the shape of a blanket used as an alternative to flowers during winter months.
- d. **Gravesite**: A burial location in a national cemetery; inclusive of all burial types (casketed, in-ground cremains, and columbaria).
- e. **Personal Items**: Refers to any item left on gravesites by visitors, such as pictures, floral arrangements, coins, and other mementos, that may be of personal or sentimental value.
- f. **Vigil Light**: A candle or small light kept burning before a shrine or gravesite.
- g. **Voluntarily Abandoned Property**: Personal property abandoned to any Federal agency in a way that immediately vests title to the property in the Government. There must be written or circumstantial evidence that the property was intentionally or voluntarily abandoned, such as placement of the property at a gravesite. This evidence should be clear that the property was not simply lost by the owner.