



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ACQUISITION AND LOGISTICS
WASHINGTON DC 20420

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November 6, 2009

OFFICE OF ACQUISITION AND LOGISTICS INFORMATION LETTER

TO: US Postal Service Postmasters; Directors, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Regional Offices (VARO); and VA Medical Centers

ATTN: Burial Flag Coordinator

SUBJ: Guidance for the Distribution and Replenishment of Burial Flags

1. Purpose: This information letter (IL) provides instructions to VA medical centers (VAMC's) and regional offices, as well as U.S. Post Offices, for facilitating the storage and distribution of burial flags for VA by the VA Service and Distribution Center (SDC), Hines, IL. It is also intended to provide the necessary information and points of contact for this program. In many cases, a working arrangement already exists between the post office, medical center, VA regional office and (VARO) in an area. This IL is not intended to replace those functioning systems as long as they meet two main criteria:

- a. They provide for replenishment of flags in a timely manner to U.S. Post Offices to ensure continuous availability;
- b. They allow for timely submission of VA Form 21-2008 to the Veterans Benefits Administration regional office(s) for First Notification of Death (FNOD) processing;

The complete flag distribution system is currently under review and this IL will provide the necessary interim guidance until such time as a new system is implemented.

2. Obtaining a Flag:

a. Applicants seeking a burial flag will be required to submit a completed copy of VA Form 21-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes, a copy of the Veteran's Certificate of Death, and DD 214, Certificate of Release or Discharged from Active Duty that contains acceptable evidence of the eligibility of the deceased Veteran. The most current version of VA Form 21-2008 may be downloaded at:

b. VA is committed to furnishing burial flags to drape the caskets of deceased Veterans who were honorably discharged from the military. When flag eligibility is in doubt, the nearest VA office may be contacted for assistance in clarifying the deceased Veteran's status; however, due to time sensitivity, the issuance of a flag may not be delayed because appropriate documentation is not available at the time of request.

c. Normally the family of the deceased Veteran or a funeral director acting on their behalf may apply for the flag. A flag may be issued subsequent to interment when circumstances prevent securing one to drape the casket. Only one flag may be issued for each deceased Veteran.

3. Initial Issue and Replenishment Process for Issuing Offices:

a. All offices issuing flags, i.e., U.S. post offices, VAMCs, and national cemeteries should have an assigned VARO and point of contact at that facility for requesting replenishment of flags. All issuing offices are initially supplied with an operating inventory of flags based upon demand and other local conditions. For new issuing offices just coming on line, an initial supply of flags needs to be obtained by requesting an initial stock from the VA SDC who will supply the flags and assign the new post office to the appropriate VARO for future replenishment support. The SDC will forward a copy of the assignment letter to the VARO with initial POC information. For initial stock or in the event of a problem with the replenishment process, the SDC Operations Division, Hines, Illinois, may be contacted for assistance by sending an e-mail message to _____, or in an emergency by phoning (708) 786-7758 or 7509. If necessary, the SDC Director's office may also be contacted at (708) 786-7502. When placing replenishment orders for flags, issuing offices should provide their servicing VARO with all the completed VA Form 21-2008 they have collected.

b. U.S. Postal Service (USPS) offices and VAROs will receive updated copies of the proposed electronic directory and/or master list containing the names of the VAROs, their addresses, telephone numbers, and the "point of contact" at each VARO located within each state including Hawaii; Guam, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Post offices currently being replenished directly by the SDC will continue to do so, however, they will be required to submit VA Forms 21-2008 to the nearest regional office, rather than to the SDC.

4. Replenishment Process for VA Regional Offices:

a. Issuing offices will forward a completed VA Form 21-2008 to the VARO servicing the issue point, ensuring the lower portion is completed in support of the replenishment action. The Veterans Service Center (VSC) manager or delegate will ensure that the lower portion of the VA Form 21-2008 is completed and forwarded to the appropriate VAMC functioning as an area distribution point, triggering replenishment of a replacement flag. The lower portion of the VA Form 21-2008 must be forwarded to the VAMC distribution point as soon as received. The top portion of the completed VA Form 21-2008 should be forwarded to the National Cemetery Administration FNOD team in St. Louis, Missouri, for FNOD processing.

b. The VSC manager or delegate is responsible for periodically surveying issuing offices within their jurisdiction to ensure an adequate supply of flags and application forms is available. The VSC manager or delegate will also ensure current area distribution point addresses and POC are current and functioning in support of the replenishment process. The VARO mailroom staff will forward the lower portion of the completed application on a daily basis to the VAMC Distribution Center having primary responsibility for replenishing the stock of burial flags at the post offices, on a daily basis.

5. Replenishment Process for Area Distribution Points (VAMCs):

a. While all VAMCs are authorized to order and issue burial flags for internal requirements i.e., death of a hospitalized Veteran), only specific VAMCs across the country are designated as area distribution points for burial flags. Other VA facilities such as regional offices, national cemeteries, etc., may also act as distribution points in some areas. The designated official at each issuing distribution point, under the direction of the facility director, will normally establish a stock level of flags based upon usage and storage capacity. The facility director will direct the support of this program using VAMC assets and personnel as necessary. Each VAMC serving as an area distribution point should continuously monitor its on-hand inventory and establish stock levels consistent with the number of requests it receives for flags via the lower portion of the VA Form 21-2008. Upon receipt of a lower portion of the VA Form 21-2008(s) from the VARO, the distribution point will mail the appropriate number of burial flags to the corresponding issuing post office directly. Flag replenishments must be shipped immediately upon receipt of the replenishment request in order to ensure that issuing post offices do not deplete their stock of flags. In addition, each VAMC will establish facility and point of contact (phone number) information for each VARO and issuing office they support. Area distribution offices (VAMCs) will replenish their own supply of burial flags (stock number F91432) by placing orders utilizing the FPOrders system referred to above. This ordering system is available via the VA intranet or by means of an on line computer session with the VA Austin Automation Center. All orders will be filled and shipped within 4 workdays of receipt. National cemeteries and VAROs are also eligible to establish an FPOrders account and receive direct shipments of flags from the SDC.

b. In an emergency situation, flags may be obtained directly by contacting the SDC Operations Division at (708) 786-7758 or 7509. Additional assistance, if necessary, is also available by phoning the SDC Director's office at (708) 786-7502.

c. If approved, all emergency shipments will require specific documentation validating the number of flags requested as well as the conditions precipitating the request. It is the responsibility of the VAMC director at each area distribution point to support the distribution process with appropriate resources and to maintain accountability for flags received.

d. When shipping flags, area distribution points should ensure that a label with the return address of the area distribution point always appears on boxes shipped to post offices. This serves a dual purpose by helping the post office identify its servicing area distribution office in the event that point of contact information is misplaced or lost. It provides a return address for the flags if they are delivered to the wrong address or are undeliverable for any other reason.

6. Distribution from the Service and Distribution Center (SDC):

a. VA distributes on average 520,000 burial flags annually from the SDC to other VA components at multiple distribution points across the country. Those distribution points are comprised of VAMCs, community-based outpatient clinics, regional offices, national cemeteries, and at times, U.S. embassies around the world. In some locations,

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U.S. embassies around the world. In some locations, U.S. Post Offices are also supplied directly by the SDC. In such cases, VA Forms 21-2008 received by the SDC will be forwarded to the VA FNOD office for processing. No completed Form 21-2008 will be retained by the SDC.

b. The supply chain begins with the SDC receiving interment flags based on pre-determined delivery schedules established in conjunction with VA contracts solicited and awarded by the Center for Acquisition Innovation, and Business Services Office of the Office of Acquisition and Logistics in VA Central Office. Contracts are awarded to a variety of flag manufacturers who produce high quality flags in accordance with Federal Specification DDD-F-416F and/or Commercial Description A-A-52696 dated August 5, 2006.

c. The SDC strives to maintain, on average, a 7- month supply of flags in its warehouse located in Building 37 on the Hines, Illinois, VA campus. This inventory level is deemed adequate to compensate for any potential disruptions in the production of the flags (i.e., plant fires, material shortages, etc). Flags are then supplied by the SDC to the area distribution point, who place orders with the SDC Operations Division utilizing the online FPOrders program. Where necessary, and with concurrence of the Chief of the SDC Operations Division, faxes, e-mails, phone calls, or written requests for replenishment may be allowed, but use of FPOrders is the preferred method. Orders will be shipped within 4 business days to the requesting facility either via common carrier, FedEx ground or other suitable means of shipment based on quantity. Overnight emergency shipments are at the discretion of SDC management.

d. The majority of flags are distributed to the next-of -kin of deceased Veterans or more often to funeral directors, acting on their behalf, by U.S. Post Offices across the country.

e. The post offices are, in turn, replenished by a VA field component, usually a VAMC, located within a reasonable distance of the issuing office at the direction of the assigned VARO. The VA facility serving as the immediate distribution point for post offices in its geographic area replenishes its own stock by ordering flags from the SDC via FPOrders. Please consult the following VA web site for further guidance:

7. Unserviceable or Returned Flags:

a. Flags received at a post office damaged or with obvious manufacturing defects should be returned for direct replacement to:

VA Service and Distribution Center
Attention: Chief of Operations
Bldg 37
1st Ave 1 Block North of Cermak
Hines, IL 60141

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b. Flags rendered unserviceable through wear and tear should be disposed of locally IAW U.S. Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8; preferably by burning. There is no provision for issuing more than one flag per Veteran, or replacements for damaged or lost flags.

8. Area Distribution Point Listing: See attached listing. Also available at the VA SDC intranet site found above.

9. Regional Office POC listing: See attached listing. Also available at the VA SDC intranet site found above.

10. References:

VBA Fast Letter 09-23, Transfer of Burial Flag Application Processing to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

VA Pamphlet 21-02-1, VA Benefits for Survivors

VA M21-1MR, Part VII, Chapter 5, Section B

VA Form 21-2008 dated September 2005

USPS Administrative Support Manual (ASM) 13, Section 474, U.S. Burial Flags

/Steve Swanson/

for
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