

## Proper Flag Disposal

In the course of time and with proper service, flags become worn and are no longer serviceable. The amount of wear and tear is a judgement call but should never be so worn as to be disrespectful. At that time, it is necessary to properly dispose of them. The American Legion, the VFW, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, as well as some state or county offices or police stations have boxes designated for that purpose. If you put the flag in one of these boxes, it will be properly disposed of. You may choose to dispose of the flag at home, but this should be done in a respectful manner by burning or burying the flag.

The American Legion developed the manual of ceremonies which was approved with Resolution 440 at the Convention held September 20-23, 1937, and adopted with the Flag Code by the Congress as law 829 Title 36 U.S. Code ch. 10 section 176 passed December 22, 1942 to properly dispose of a worn flag. They suggest that the flag be burned intact, but, if it is too large to burn intact, it should be respectfully cut into four quadrants, not cutting the blue star field as this symbolizes the union of the states. Once the flag is cut, it is no longer considered a flag of the nation. The American Legion family does not sanction cutting the stars from the flag to be distributed. If a flag is plastic or would be hazardous to burn, it should be buried.

The standard ceremony generally used by the Legion family for disposal consists of parallel lines of onlookers. The flags to be burned are brought before the Commander (or the person leading the ceremony) where he or she certifies that the flags are no longer serviceable. The color Guard presents the colors, and the chaplain offers prayers. The crowd salutes as the flag (which may be dipped in kerosene to speed burning) is placed on the fire, and the bugle sounds "Call to Colors". Once the flag(s) have burned, the Color Guard and the onlookers are dismissed, and the ashes are buried. The words of the ceremony may be found in the Legion manual of ceremonies or at [legion.org/flag/ceremony](http://legion.org/flag/ceremony).

As a symbol of our Nation, it is important that we treat the flag with respect and do not fly torn or tattered flags. When they have reached the end of their service, a dignified disposal is proper. At no time should an American flag reach the landfill or be placed in a garbage can. If you do not know how or where to properly dispose of your flag, call your local American Legion. Someone will be happy to help you show the proper respect for the banner that inspires so many to selfless service.

Submitted by Marie Mock, (former) Eastern Division Chairman

### Resources:

U.S. Department of Defense; [defense.gov](http://defense.gov)

U.S. Flag Code

[Let's Be Right on Flag Etiquette](#)

[Hunker.com](http://Hunker.com)