

VA National Cemeteries Resume Committal and Memorial Services Halted by COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Funeral Directors:

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries will resume committal services starting June 9 in all but two VA national cemeteries.

VA national cemeteries will contact families who were unable to hold a committal service due to the COVID-19 pandemic to arrange memorial services for their loved ones beginning in July.

Families with interments scheduled on or after June 9 will be offered the option of a committal service at the time of interment. At Calverton and Long Island national cemeteries in New York, that option will be available starting June 22 provided state and local guidance permit.

To schedule committal services, please contact the National Cemetery Scheduling Office beginning June 6 at (800) 535-1117.

NCA has implemented a robust set of measures that will allow us to conduct committal and memorial services while protecting the health and safety of Veterans, their families and our team members who serve them. VA national cemeteries continue to adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Cemetery directors have the authority and responsibility to maintain a safe environment at the cemetery for visitors and employees. **As such, if a family member or attendee refuses to follow safety measures at the committal shelter the cemetery will not conduct the committal service or allow the witnessing of the interment.**

To ensure the safety of our visitors and employees, all attendees are required to follow these safety measures:

- **Limit the Number of Attendees:** Families must abide by cemetery limits on the number of individuals attending the committal service. The number of attendees permitted at committal service will vary based on state and local guidelines for gathering sizes and the ability of the cemetery to accommodate attendees while maintaining physical distancing, but nowhere will the number permitted to attend be fewer than 10. Cemetery team members, funeral home personnel, and military honors providers do not count toward the limited number of attendees. *Funeral home*

directors should contact the local cemetery for more details regarding the exact number of attendees permitted at the cemetery.

- **Wear Face Masks:** All family members, attendees, funeral home personnel, military honor providers, and cemetery staff must wear a face mask or covering.
- **Maintain Physical Distancing:** A least 6 feet of distance must be maintained between individuals. People living together in the same household do not need to maintain a 6-foot distance from each other.
- **Stay Home if you are Sick:** Individuals who are sick or not feeling well should not attend the service.

Funeral home directors are asked to emphasize the cemetery's requirement that all attendees follow these safety measures for the committal service to commence.

Families wishing to display floral arrangements on stands at the committal service may do so, however, all handling, placement and removal of the arrangements must be done by funeral home personnel or the family. Floral arrangements will not be transported by cemetery personnel to the gravesite at the time of interment. Families wishing to place a floral arrangement(s) (limit 2) may do so after 4:30 p.m. on the day of interment or any time thereafter. These changes will be in effect until further notice. As a reminder, cemeteries will not accept floral arrangements for direct interments.

Funeral home personnel, families and visitors should be aware that some buildings, such as Public Information Centers, Administrative Buildings, and chapels remain closed to the public. Contact the local cemeteries for specific information.

Military funeral honors, customarily provided by the Department of Defense and volunteer honor guards, will be based on local availability. Funeral home directors are encouraged to contact military funeral honors providers to determine services and availability. Military honors personnel will be required to wear a face mask and maintain physical distancing.

Families are not required to conduct a committal service. They may continue to choose direct interment and opt for a memorial service at a later date when all restrictions have been lifted.

Memorial services for Veterans and eligible family members who were interred without a committal service between March 23 and June 8 will commence in July. Cemetery representatives will be reaching out to all of these families in the coming weeks to discuss their options and schedule a memorial service, if

desired. Families may also contact the National Cemetery Scheduling Office or the cemetery directly to schedule a memorial service after June 29, 2020.

Conditions and restrictions at local cemeteries can and will change in response to state, local and federal guidelines and orders. You are encouraged to contact your local cemetery for specific information or details.

Lastly, NCA would like to thank you for all that you have done for our nation's Veterans and their families during these unprecedented times. Your partnership and commitment to ensure Veterans receive the burial benefits they deserve is always appreciated and not forgotten.

For more information, visit the NCA's website, <https://www.cem.va.gov>. To make burial arrangements at any VA national cemetery, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at (800) 535-1117.

Thank you for your cooperation,

The National Cemetery Administration