

PROPERLY RETIRING THE FLAG

Objectives:

- Understand the history of the flag
- Know who can dispose of a flag
- Know how to properly retire a flag

History:

The American flag was made by Betsy Ross and adopted on June 14, 1777, to represent the new union of the 13 original states. Those 13 original colonies were Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island. It had 13 stripes, alternating red and white, and 13 white stars on a blue field. Today, the flag consists of 13 horizontal stripes, alternating with seven red and six white, as well as 50 white stars. The red symbolizes hardiness and valor, white symbolizes purity and innocence, and the blue represents vigilance, perseverance, and justice.

Activity:

- Look at the photos below and choose which ones should be retired.
- Discuss how you would retire a flag.
- Locate your local community disposal boxes.





PROPER WAYS TO RETIRE A FLAG

Who can dispose of a flag?

Anyone can hold a flag disposal ceremony. Whoever chooses to retire a flag should only proceed in a way that is respectful and dignified. It is never appropriate to put an American flag in the trash.

When should a flag be retired?

The U.S. Flag Code says:

"The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

Flag Day (June 14) is one of the most common days to hold a flag disposal ceremony.

Flag Burning Ceremony

The preferred way to dispose of an American flag is to hold a flag burning ceremony at your home or other private location. Begin a flag-burning ceremony by folding the whole flag in its customary manner (learn how with our **Our Flag** and **Flag Folding Instructions** resources!) Next, start a fire large enough to completely burn the flag and respectfully place the flag into the fire. The flag should not touch the ground in the process. As the flag begins to burn, salute the flag, say the Pledge of Allegiance, and pause for a moment of silence. The flag should be thoroughly burned so that nothing but ashes are left. Finally, bury the ashes.

Burying A Flag

Although the U.S. Flag Code says that burning is the preferred method to dispose of a flag, people also choose to retire flags via burial. If you choose this method, place a folded flag in a dignified wooden box. Pause for a moment of silence after burying the flag box in the ground.

Community Disposal Box

A community disposal box is another way to dispose of an American Flag. You can drop it off in a flag disposal box, which are often provided by many local government offices and police stations. Throughout the year, organizations like the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts collect the disposed flags and hold ceremonies to retire them. Some organizations will accept worn-out American flags, remove the embroidered stars and send them to American soldiers.