

## OPERATIONAL STANDARDS FOR VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

**1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To update NCA Directive 3000 to reflect updates to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) National Shrine Commitment Operational Standards and Measures.

**2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES:** This directive updates the references to National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Operational Standards and Measures on page 1 and the appendix cover page to refer to new Version 4.0 of the document as published in October 2009; clarifies program responsibilities; and updates the NCA Strategic Plan reference on page 4.

**NOTE:** *New/revised information is indicated by a line in the left margin.*

**3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCA, Office of Field Programs and Office of Finance and Planning, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420, are jointly responsible for the contents of this directive.

### 4. RELATED PUBLICATIONS:

- a. NCA Directive 3120 – Interment Area Layout (11/19/2004)
- b. NCA Handbook 3120 – Interment Area Layout (3/8/2001)
- c. NCA Handbook 3012 – Uniforms and Special Clothing for National Cemetery Employees (1/29/2007)
- d. NCA Handbook 3420 – Turfgrass Maintenance in VA National Cemeteries (9/9/2008)
- e. NCA National Shrine Commitment: Operational Standards and Measures, Version 4.0 (October 2009), is incorporated in this directive as an appendix.

**5. RESCISSIONS:** NCA Directive 3000 – Operational Standards for National Cemeteries is re-issued in its entirety.

**6. RECERTIFICATION:** This publication is scheduled for recertification in January 2013.

/s/  
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Acting Under Secretary  
for Memorial Affairs

Distribution: Electronic

## OPERATIONAL STANDARDS FOR VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES

### 1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

a. The purpose of this Directive is to establish operational standards for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries administered by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), and to establish operational measures or performance indicators for those standards. The key areas include interments, grounds and equipment maintenance, headstone/marker operations, safety, and facilities maintenance. Certain sites will have geographically defined standard operating procedures to allow for variances in climate, topography and soil conditions.

b. The standards and measures stated in this document should be considered as goals and requirements for the performance of key operational processes and should be applied at both open and closed national cemeteries where work is done by either a Federal or contract workforce.

c. The statutory authority for this directive is title 38, United States Code, section 2404.

### 2. POLICY

NCA is committed to operating and maintaining all VA national cemeteries, open and closed, as national shrines that will perpetually honor the sacrifices of those who served the United States as members of the Armed Forces, and their eligible family members.

a. The operational standards identified in the appendix to this directive ("National Shrine Commitment, Operational Standards and Measures" Version 4.0, October 2009) set goals for key cemetery operations in order to promote consistency throughout all national cemeteries. Cemetery Directors are to use the standards and measures contained in the appendix to plan, monitor and manage the cemeteries they are responsible for to assure they achieve the best possible performance level.

b. Responsible offices are to use these standards and measures to establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at the national, Memorial Service Network, or individual cemetery level. SOPs for key cemetery operations will enable staff to achieve the best possible performance with effective and efficient use of resources and staff, and minimize any negative impact on families and visitors.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. The **Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs** is responsible for the overall administration of VA national cemeteries in accordance with their role as national shrines.

b. The **Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs** is responsible for ensuring that staff responsibilities related to NCA operational standards are carried out appropriately.

c. **Office of Field Programs** is responsible for:

(1) Establishing national standard operating procedures for those standards requiring consistency in all national cemeteries; and

(2) Providing accurate, valid and reliable data collection systems.

d. **Office of Construction Management** will manage the addition or elimination of cemetery features and structures.

e. **State Cemetery Grants Service** will:

(1) Advise state officials that VA requires assurance when submitting a preapplication for a grant that "Any cemetery established, expanded, or improved through a grant will be maintained and operated in accordance with the operational standards and measures of the National Cemetery Administration;"

(2) Educate state veterans cemetery directors and other state officials about NCA's National Shrine commitment, and the operational standards and measures formally adopted by NCA in this directive; and

(3) Use NCA "Operational Standards and Measures" when conducting inspections of state veterans cemeteries established, expanded, or improved with assistance under the grants program administered by NCA.

f. **Office of Finance and Planning** will:

(1) Develop NCA checklists to document national cemetery performance as needed for operational standards;

(2) Analyze data collected to provide performance reports to responsible offices; and

(3) Assist national cemeteries in developing strategies to improve key cemetery operations.

g. **Information Technology and Business Requirements Service** will, based on Office of Finance and Planning prerequisites, write requirements to have Office of Information and Technology develop or enhance, new or existing automated information systems that will:

(1) Capture necessary data to measure performance; and

(2) Generate statistical reports.

h. **Logistics Management Service** is responsible for enforcing contract requirements that support operational standards and measures.

i. **Centralized Contracting Division** and **Memorial Programs Service** will ensure timely processing of headstone and marker orders.

j. **Memorial Service Network (MSN) Directors** are responsible for ensuring national cemeteries under their jurisdiction have:

(1) A current Cemetery Grounds Management Plan compatible with the geographic region that includes all required maintenance activities;

- (2) A current Cemetery Equipment Maintenance Plan that includes all equipment maintenance activities and schedules;
- (3) A recycling plan, where applicable;
- (4) Local Standard Operating Procedures for key cemetery operations, where necessary;
- (5) A current Cemetery Layout Map, updated by the MSN Office every six months;
- (6) An active Safety Program;
- (7) A current Facilities Maintenance Plan; and
- (8) Included standards and measures in all operations and maintenance Statements of Work developed for a cemetery.

**k. Cemetery Directors will:**

- (1) Perpetually maintain gravesites and developed acres in a manner befitting their stature as national shrines;
- (2) Identify necessary repairs, renovations and improvements required in the appearance of burial grounds and structures;
- (3) Maintain a current and comprehensive Cemetery Grounds Management Plan compatible with the geographic region (the plan should include all required grounds maintenance activities);
- (4) Maintain a comprehensive Cemetery Equipment Maintenance Plan which includes manufacturers' required maintenance activities and the manufacturers' recommended time schedules (the plan should also identify preventive maintenance tasks to be completed by the equipment operators prior to using the equipment, and upon completion of use);
- (5) Maintain a comprehensive Cemetery Facilities Maintenance Plan, to include all required facilities maintenance activities;
- (6) Participate in a recycling program, where applicable;
- (7) Establish local Standard Operating Procedures for key cemetery operations, where necessary, due to variances in climate, topography and soil conditions;
- (8) Maintain an active Safety Program at the facility; and
- (9) Ensure that Statements of Work for cemetery operations contracts arranged through NCA or Veterans Health Administration address the standards and measures stated in this directive.

#### 4. REFERENCES

| National Cemetery Administration FY2008-FY2012 Strategic Plan

#### 5. DEFINITIONS

A glossary is included at the end of the "[Operational Standards and Measures](#)" document in the appendix to this directive. General categories of standards are defined below:

a. **Interment operations standards** address all actions that occur between the initial application for burial and finalizing the gravesite and include: application processing, interment scheduling, burial section layout, site preparation, committal services, verification of proper placement, appearance of finished gravesites and active burial sections, and the safety procedures associated with those activities.

b. **Grounds maintenance operations standards** promote a general cemetery appearance that is aesthetically pleasing and generally consistent throughout all VA national cemeteries, and meets the NCA commitment to maintain these cemeteries as national shrines. The standards address all actions necessary for the initial establishment of turf or other suitable surface on a gravesite and the perpetual maintenance of all areas of the cemetery, including turf or other surfacing materials, ornamental trees and shrubs, woodlands, water features, planting beds, waste management, and the safety procedures associated with those activities.

c. **Headstone and marker operations standards** apply to actions taken by national cemeteries, Memorial Programs Service, and Management Support Service, Centralized Contracting Division. The standards include all actions from the processing of the initial request through the order, manufacture, delivery and installation of the headstone or marker, ongoing maintenance actions, and the safety procedures associated with those activities.

d. **Equipment maintenance operations standards** promote consistent proper equipment maintenance in all VA national cemeteries, and protect the fiscal and tangible resources of NCA. The standards include general and preventive maintenance actions for all cemetery equipment and address personnel qualifications, records and documentation, condition of equipment and tools, and the safety procedures associated with those activities.

e. **General operations standards** promote the appropriate appearance and condition of cemetery facilities and staff. The standards address cemetery staff attire, posting of hours, and the appearance and condition of cemetery facilities and structures such as roads, parking lots, signs, and buildings.

**FIELD OPERATIONAL STANDARDS**

**APPENDIX A**

**National Cemetery Administration**

**National Shrine Commitment**

**[Operational Standards and Measures](#)**

**Version 4.0**

**October 2009**