

About National Flag of Canada etiquette

Flags are thought to have first been used as a method of designating a rallying point for troops in battle. Today, they are used as a symbolic identification for countries, groups and organizations, both nationally and internationally.

The National Flag of Canada and the flags of the provinces and territories are symbols of honour and pride for all Canadians. They should be treated with respect.

The manner in which flags may be displayed in Canada is not governed by legislation but rather by established practice. The etiquette outlined in this section is an adaptation of international usage and of customs that the federal government has been observing for many years.

The rules applied by the federal government are in no way mandatory for individuals or organizations; they may serve as guidelines for all persons who wish to display the National Flag of Canada and other flags in Canada.

Various authorities regulate the use of flags at the federal level in Canada. The Department of Canadian Heritage is responsible for establishing the protocol and guidelines for the use of the National Flag of Canada across all federal buildings, properties and institutions, both in Canada and abroad. The Directorate of History and Heritage of the Canadian Armed Forces regulates the use of military flags and emblems.

The creation and registration of official heraldic emblems, including flags, for Canadian individuals, municipalities and institutions falls under the purview of the [Canadian Heraldic Authority](#), which is part of the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General.

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Half-masting the flag

Flags are half-masted as a sign of respect and to express a collective sense of sorrow during a time of national mourning. Given that national flags are recognized throughout the world as the ultimate symbols of their respective nations, the act of half-masting is a dramatic visual statement that speaks to the sense of loss that is shared by all their citizens.

Given the importance of the symbol of half-masting, the Government of Canada adopted the [Rules for half-masting the National Flag of Canada](#) to ensure a consistent approach to half-masting the National Flag at all federal buildings and installations. Similar rules are adopted by provinces, territories, municipalities and other organizations within their own jurisdictions.

Learn about [half-masting and flag etiquette in times of mourning](#).

[Rules for flying the National Flag of Canada - Canada.ca](#)

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Rules for half-masting the National Flag of Canada

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Objectives

The half-masting of national flags is a well-established procedure whereby countries bestow an honour and express a collective sense of sorrow. Given that such flags are recognized as paramount symbols of their nations, the act of half-masting is a dramatic visual statement that speaks to the sense of loss that is shared by all their citizens.

It is in this context that the Government of Canada wishes to further develop the principles that will determine the half-masting policy relative to the National Flag of Canada as well as the precise arrangements to be put in place and exercised in a consistent and appropriate manner. Therefore, the Government of Canada has adopted the rules hereto attached.

Definitions

Unless the context otherwise requires it, the following terms shall mean:

"Flag"

the National Flag of Canada as approved by Parliament and proclaimed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada, on February 15, 1965.

"Half-mast"

the position of the Flag when flying at half-mast will depend on its size, the length of the mast and its location; but, as a general rule, the centre of the Flag should be exactly half-way down the mast. When hoisted to or lowered from half-mast position, a flag should be first raised to the masthead.

"Rules"

the Rules for Half-masting the National Flag of Canada.

I. Mandatory Half-masting

1. The Sovereign, the Governor General and the Prime Minister

Upon the death of the Sovereign, the current Governor General or the current Prime Minister, the Flag is flown at Half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada and abroad, including the Peace Tower, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or the memorial service.

2. Sovereign's Family

Upon the death of the Sovereign's spouse, the Heir to the Throne or the Heir of the Heir to the Throne, the Flag is flown at Half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada and abroad, including the Peace Tower, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or, if there is to be a memorial service, the Half-masting should take place from the time of notification of death until sunset the following day and from sunrise to sunset on the day of the memorial service.

3. Former Governor General

Upon the death of a former Governor General, the Flag is flown at Half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada, including the Peace Tower, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or, if there is to be a memorial service, the Half-masting should take place from the time of notification of death until sunset the following day and from sunrise to sunset on the day of the memorial service.

4. Former Prime Minister

Upon the death of a former Prime Minister, the Flag is flown at Half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada, including the Peace Tower, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or, if there is to be a memorial service, the Half-masting should take place from the time of notification of death until sunset the following day and from sunrise to sunset on the day of the memorial service.

5. Chief Justice of Canada and Members of the Canadian Ministry

Upon the death of the current Chief Justice of Canada or a current member of the Canadian Ministry, the Flag is flown at Half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada, including the Peace Tower, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or, if there is to be a memorial service, the Half-masting should take place from the time of notification of death until sunset the following day and from sunrise to sunset on the day of the memorial service.

6. Lieutenant Governors

Upon the death of a current Lieutenant Governor, the Flag is flown at Half-mast on all federal buildings and establishments in the affected Province and on the Peace Tower, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or, if there is to be a memorial service, the Half-masting should take place from the time of notification of death until sunset the following day and from sunrise to sunset on the day of the memorial service.

7. Privy Councillors and Senators

Upon the death of a Privy Councillor, who is not a current member of the Canadian Ministry, or a current Senator, the Flag is flown at Half-mast:

- on all federal buildings and establishments in his or her place of residence, excluding the Peace Tower if the place of residence is Ottawa, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or the memorial service;
- on the Peace Tower from sunrise to sunset on the day of the funeral or the memorial service, as the case may be.

8. Members of the House of Commons

Upon the death of a current member of the House of Commons, the Flag is flown at Half-mast:

- on all federal buildings and establishments in his or her riding, excluding the Peace Tower if the riding is in Ottawa, from the time of notification of death until sunset on the day of the funeral or the memorial service;
- on the Peace Tower from sunrise to sunset on the day of the funeral or the memorial service, as the case may be.

9. Accredited Heads of Mission to Canada while in Canada

Upon the death of an accredited Head of Mission to Canada (High Commissioner or Ambassador) while in Canada, the Flag on the Peace Tower is to be half-masted on the day of the funeral/memorial service or, should there be no such service scheduled, on the day that the remains depart Canada. (Should a service be scheduled on a date different from the one that will witness the departure, half-masting would take place on the day of the service and not on the day that the remains depart Canada).

10. Half-Masting Initiated by a Province or Territory

When a Province or Territory Half-masts its provincial or territorial flag for a reason other than one provided for in the Rules, the Flag will be Half-masted within that Province or Territory, except on the Peace Tower if the Province is Ontario, to the same geographical extent and for the same duration as the Province or Territory Half-masts its flag. The Flag will only be Half-masted

in the said Province or Territory upon notification to the Manager responsible for the administration of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage by the Chief of Protocol of that Province or Territory of the reason, geographical extent and duration of the said Half-masting.

11. Special Days

The Flag will be Half-masted on all federal buildings and establishments in Canada, including the Peace Tower, from sunrise to sunset on the following days:

- April 28, Day of Mourning for Persons Killed or Injured in the Workplace (Workers' Mourning Day);
- June 23, National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Terrorism;
- Second Sunday in September, Firefighters' National Memorial Day, unless Half-masting occurs near the place where a memorial is being observed, then Half-masting can occur according to the prescribed order of service;
- Last Sunday in September, Police and Peace Officers' National Memorial Day, unless Half-masting occurs near the place where a memorial is being observed, then Half-masting can occur according to the prescribed order of service;
- September 30, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation;
- November 11, Remembrance Day, unless Half-masting occurs at the National War Memorial or a place where remembrance is being observed, then Half-masting can occur at 11:00 or according to the prescribed order of service;
- December 6, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

In addition, the Flag will be Half-masted on the Peace Tower:

- April 9, Vimy Ridge Day; and
- for the duration of the annual Memorial Service on Parliament Hill to remember deceased Parliamentarians.

II. Discretionary Provisions

12. Foreign Heads of State or Heads of Government - Half-masting Abroad

Upon the death of a current foreign head of state or a foreign head of government, the head of the local embassy, high commission or permanent mission may Half-mast the Flag in the host country, consistent with the practice adopted by the government of the host country.

Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada will inform the Manager responsible for the administration of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage of the occurrence of the event and the Half-masting measures taken in the affected country. The Director General

responsible for the implementation of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage will in turn inform the Privy Council Office.

13. Special Circumstances in a Foreign Country

To commemorate prominent citizens of a host country, or a resident of that country who had made a significant contribution to Canada, or special events affecting the host country, the head of the local embassy, high commission or permanent mission may Half-mast the Flag in the host country consistent with the practice adopted by the government of the host country.

Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada will inform the Manager responsible for the administration of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage of the occurrence of the event and the Half-masting measures taken in the affected country. The Director General responsible for the implementation of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage will in turn inform the Privy Council Office.

14. Employees of the Federal Government

When an employee of a federal department, agency or Crown corporation dies in the line of duty or by reason of the position he or she occupies within that federal department, agency or Crown corporation, the Minister responsible for that organization may decide to Half-mast the Flag. Half-masting in such circumstances can only be carried out on those buildings and establishments affiliated to the organization. The Minister may decide on the geographical extent of the Half-masting and its duration. The decision must be shared immediately with the Manager responsible for the administration of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Director General responsible for the implementation of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage will in turn inform the Privy Council Office.

III. Discretionary Authority of the Prime Minister

15. Foreign Heads of State or Heads of Government - Half-masting in Canada

Upon the death of a current foreign head of state or a foreign head of government, and after consideration of his/her stature and the relation of that country with Canada, the Prime Minister may approve the Half-masting of the Flag on the Peace Tower on the advice of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada and Canadian Heritage, and the recommendation of the Clerk of the Privy Council.

16. Exceptional Circumstances

In exceptional circumstances, and on the advice of the Department of Canadian Heritage and the recommendation of the Clerk of the Privy Council, the Prime Minister may approve the Half-masting of the Flag on the Peace Tower, and/or on all or some federal buildings and establishments in Canada or abroad, that is not provided for in the Rules.

17. Delegation of Authority

In the event that the Prime Minister is not available to consider the recommendations pursuant to Section 15 or 16 on an urgent basis, the Clerk of the Privy Council shall have the delegated authority to decide.

18. Information from the Department of Canadian Heritage

The Director General responsible for the implementation of the Rules within the Department of Canadian Heritage will provide information regarding past instances of Half-masting and recommendations as to the geographical extent and duration of any Half-masting under consideration pursuant to Sections 15 and 16.

IV. Procedures

19. Legal Holidays

If the Flag is Half-masted anywhere in Canada or abroad in accordance with the Rules, it must nonetheless be flown at full-mast on the following legal holidays created under the Holidays Act (R.S.C. c. H-5): Victoria Day and Canada Day.

20. Visiting Foreign Head of State or Head of Government

If the Flag is Half-masted on the Peace Tower in accordance with the Rules, it must nonetheless be raised to full-mast while a foreign head of state or foreign head of government is visiting Parliament.

21. Exceptions to Sections 19 and 20

Sections 19 and 20 do not apply if the Flag is Half-masted for the death of the Sovereign, but the Flag is flown at full-mast on the day on which the accession of the new monarch is proclaimed. Sections 19 and 20 also do not apply if the Flag is Half-masted for the death of the current Governor General or the current Prime Minister.

22. Half-Masting Notice

Upon the occurrence of an event provided for in Sections 1 to 11 or upon the approval of the Prime Minister pursuant to Section 15 or 16, the Department of Canadian Heritage will send a notice to all relevant authorities instructing them to Half-mast the Flag. The notice will stipulate the reason, geographical extent and duration of the Half-masting. A brief biography must also accompany the notice when Half-masting is carried out upon the death of a person.

23. Coming into Effect

The Rules, as amended, are effective as of June 2, 2003, and replace any previously existing rules developed through practice or articulated in Sections 12 and 13 of the General Rules for Flying and Displaying the Canadian Flag and Other Flags in Canada (1966).

[Rules for half-masting the National Flag of Canada - Canada.ca](#)

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