

Contact: Deborah K. Campbell
703-792-5328
dcampbell@pwcgov.org

Media Release

For Immediate Release

Flag Retirement Honors 9-11

Local Boy Scouts continue quest to retire flags with dignity

Prince William, VA, September 18, 2020 –On September 11th, an estimated 4,500 to 5,000 United States flags, collected by a Boy Scouts program at the Prince William County Landfill and Balls Ford Compost Facility were retired in a dignified manner. “We had the honor of retiring 1240 pounds of flag,” said David Byrne (former BSA Occoquan District Chair) about him and his two sons, Jake and Thomas. The father and sons team took the flags to the Fairfax County Energy Resource Recovery Facility, run by Covanta, for retirement. The staff at the facility provides support for the retirement process.

Citizens and organizations may drop off their torn and tattered flags at one of the two Solid Waste Division site in Prince William County. Each site has a special collection bin, built, and donated as Boy Scout Eagle Projects. Flags deposited into the bins are collected throughout the year and processed for retirement. This includes distributing the flags to local scout units (both Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and American Heritage Girls) to be separated based on their material. Cotton and polyester flags are folded and often retired by these units because they burn cleanly. The flags are retired in a solemn ceremony. Nylon flags, becoming more and more popular for their durability and light weight, emit toxic fumes when burned so they are separated and retired by incineration one to two times annually.

Covanta, the organization that runs the Fairfax County Energy Resource Recovery Facility, a partner of the Scouts’ program since 2019, has adopted a special process to ensure a respectful retirement of all flags presented. In this process, the flags are loaded into a special carrier, typically in plastic bags to ensure they drop properly into the incinerator. They are then taken by elevator to a special section of the incinerator to avoid them being comingled with refuse. The flags are personally escorted throughout the entire process.

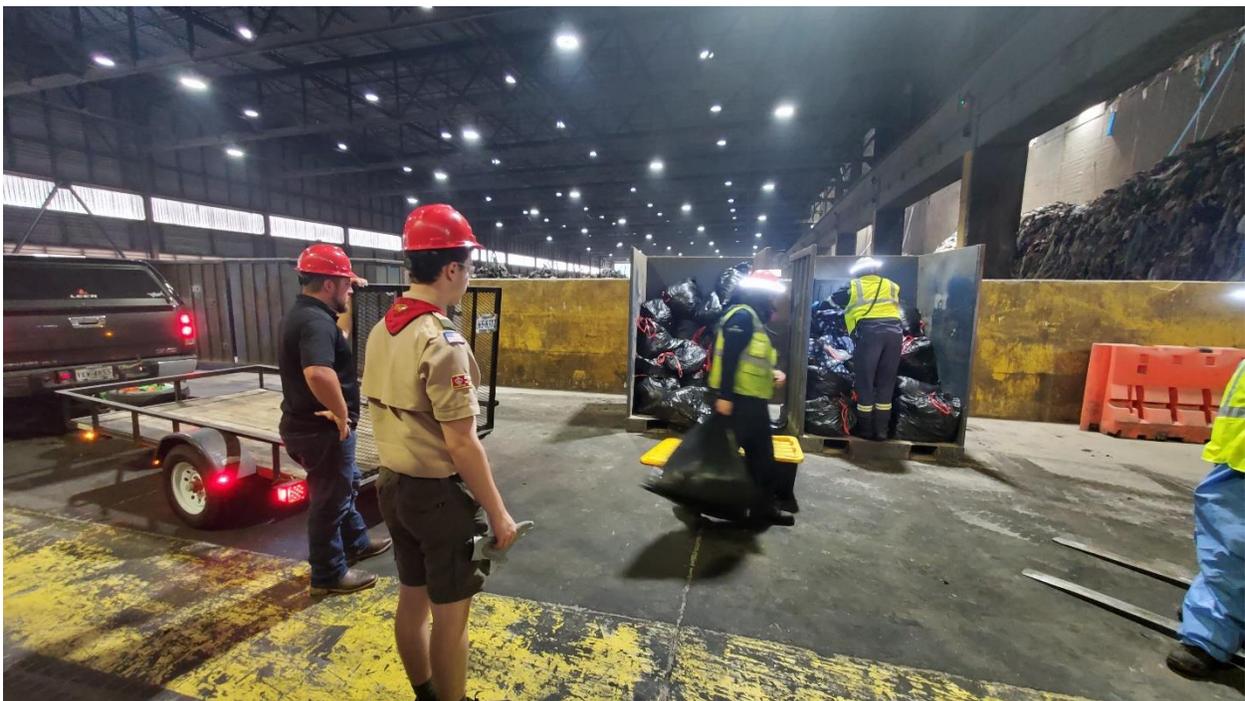
The Prince William County American Flag Collection Program, a joint venture between The Prince William District Boy Scouts, Keep Prince William Beautiful and Prince William County Solid Waste Division, and founded by David Byrne, has retired in excess of 20,000 US flags since its inception in 2014.

“I would like to personally thank Mr. Lorenzo Irving and the staff at the Covanta facility for their help in making this possible,” said Byrne. “The gentlemen that assist loading the flags are always respectful and professional in their efforts to maintain a dignified process for retiring the flags,” he added.

The Prince William County American Flag Collection Program is open during normal operating hours at the landfill and Balls Ford Road sites.

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2 Photos and captions below



Jake and Thomas Byrne stand watch as staff of Covanta place the flags in special bins.

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Dave and Thomas Byrne and Covanta staff prepare to retire by incineration the torn and tattered flags collected by the Scout programs at the Prince William County Landfill and the Balls Ford Road Compost Facility.

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