

SUBSTANCE-FREE HOUSING

SUCCESS GUIDE





Introduction

Betas have long believed that true brotherhood is built through shared social experiences that facilitate trust and deep, meaningful relationships. Betas also believe that finding this sense of home within the Fraternity is best achieved when a chapter's environment closely aligns with the organization's values. It is in that spirit that the Board of Trustees adopted a Substance-Free Housing Policy in 2003 for all newly established chapters and re-establishments.

In February 2018, that policy was amended and expanded by the Board of Trustees, then affirmed and moved into the [Beta Theta Pi Risk Management Policy](#) by order of the undergraduate and alumni delegates at the 179th General Convention. These updates were carried out in two phases across multiple years, with all Beta homes becoming substance-free in August 2020.

Sustaining substance-free housing may, at first glance, be considered a challenge for some chapters. However, as with any major challenge, careful planning and a thoughtful approach can make this challenge less dramatic and, ultimately, more successful.

The General Fraternity has created this guide to help chapters work through several steps on the path to successfully operating a substance-free facility.

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Understanding the Policy

Creating long-lasting success is hard and takes patience, understanding and dedication. For this to happen, everyone – chapter brothers, advisors, alumni and the house corporation – must be on the same page. To help get there, the following are important resources to review and steps to take early in the transition period.

WHY WAS THE SUBSTANCE-FREE HOUSING POLICY ADOPTED?

The Fraternity's primary responsibility is to create safer environments for our members and their guests. Beta Theta Pi's own data, in addition to data from the greater Greek community, clearly show a correlation between the presence of alcohol, tobacco and drugs and the increase in risk management incidents, deterioration of our facilities, furnishings and individuals' attitudes towards the treatment of our homes. Additionally, a majority of undergraduate Betas are under the legal age to purchase and possess alcohol at any given time. Finally, for those who choose to drink, most campus communities offer a multitude of establishments where doing so is safer and presents less risk to our chapters.

Resources

[Substance-Free Housing Policy](#)

Read the Substance-Free Housing Policy in its entirety, including additional rationale and detailed information on changes to the original policy (2003) as adopted by the 179th General Convention (2018).

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

You'll no doubt encounter questions from fellow brothers, parents, Greek peers or campus officials about this important change. Be prepared by reviewing this list of commonly asked questions about the Substance-Free Housing Policy beforehand.

HOW DID THE SUBSTANCE-FREE HOUSING POLICY COME TO BE?

The policy itself is older than you might think, and the timeline below looks back at the series of events that led to its Fraternity-wide adoption.

August 2004 | The Board of Trustees' 2003 policy requiring all new and restarted chapters to implement substance-free housing is enacted.

February 2017 | The Board continued its multi-year evaluation of data and research related to alcohol in chapter houses, expansion success under the Substance-Free Housing Policy, rising insurance rates and claims, and experiences of interfraternal peers. The Board solicits broad feedback on potential actions.

January/February 2018 | Changes to the Substance-Free Housing Policy are affirmed by the Board and announced as part of a broader set of strategic initiatives.

August 2018 | Delegates of the 179th General Convention codify the policy by

incorporating it into Beta's Risk Management Policy. Phase one – eliminating hard alcohol and requiring substance-free common spaces – is implemented.

August 2020 | Chapters were fully transitioned to substance-free housing.

WHERE DO WE START?

Maintaining success is a long road, but overcoming a challenge must start somewhere. We recommend beginning with an internal audit of current practices and attitudes toward your events, facility and chapter culture. Then, updating your chapter members on your findings and setting new expectations.

Internal Audit

Take a step back with your team and conduct an internal audit, including reviewing events, current house policies and chapter practices that could lead members to violate the Substance-Free Housing Policy. For instance:

Chapter Home | Are there large open spaces or built-in bars that encourage drinking?

- Involve your alumni or the Fraternity's Housing Department early on to develop alternative uses for these spaces.
- Changing the home doesn't have to be daunting. Fresh carpet, new lighting, repainting, or permanent furniture are simple switches that can make a dramatic impact on the environment. Think of the types of spaces members want to have within the house, it could be a gaming room, more study space or a weight room.
- Designated Educational Area (DEA) Grants can be a helpful tool to incentivize alumni fundraising. Beta's Cornerstone Housing Department can help with DEA Grants if your house corporation and/or alumni association are interested.

Chapter Culture | The Beta Brotherhood Assessment tool (released each fall) will provide your chapter with a data-driven picture of your brotherhood. For a quality analysis, make sure all members complete the survey within five weeks of receipt.

Chapter Update

Next, have a discussion at your first chapter meeting or hold a special meeting focused on discussing the Risk Management Policy and specifically, Substance-Free Housing. Make sure to also discuss how the leadership is working towards setting expectations of each member.

- We recommend having advisors, your district/regional chief or an Administrative Office staffer present to help answer questions members may have about substance-free housing.
- Be ready to explain education/resources that the chapter will provide to ensure a smooth transition, as well as any follow-up processes for individuals breaking the new policies.



Sustaining the Change

Once the chapter has reviewed and understands the reasoning behind substance-free housing, it's time to work on creating a sustainable culture within the chapter. This section will cover how to document changes within your chapter, and how to adjust events and finances accordingly.

Amend Your Bylaws

Two-thirds of Beta chapters have operated under the Substance-Free Housing Policy for some time – many of them regular winners of the prestigious John Reily Knox Award. One key to their success is the creation and enforcement of accountability measures related to their facility. Beta Mu at Purdue University is one such example of a chapter that has [structured their bylaws](#) with housing accountability measures in mind.

Coach the Kai Committee

Consider holding a coaching session with all members of the Kai Committee to talk through the importance of the substance-free Housing and holding members accountable to the expectations of a substance-free home.

- Include the local advising team by having them lead the coaching session, which should include a review of the [Kai Committee Guide](#).

Create a Membership Agreement

In life, it's best when obligations and expectations are clearly expressed in writing. Some of the most successful Beta chapters have been doing just that for years. The [Membership Expectations](#) agreement is a clear and concise way of communicating Beta's standards to your active membership and potential new members. Doing so early on in one's membership creates a simple path for accountability.

Plan Social Events

Substance-free housing has no impact on your chapter's ability to hold social events, merely the location where they take place. One thing that has not changed is Beta's core value of responsible conduct and this must remain a top priority when planning any activity regardless of venue.

- The Fraternity has developed an [Event Planning Guide](#) for use when planning all chapter-sponsored events.
- Reference the [Third-Party Checklist](#) to plan events using outside vendors.
- Adhere to the easy-to-use [BYOB Checklist](#) when planning applicable events.
- Ask your university for local businesses that may act as third-party vendors at your chapter events (bars, restaurants, country clubs, hotels, etc.)

Schedule Alumni Events

Under the expanded Risk Management Policy, up to seven alumni events with alcohol per year are allowed to be hosted in the homes of chapters that transitioned to substance-free housing. District chiefs are an integral part of the review and approval process for the events as outlined in the [Alumni Event Approval Checklist](#). Applications are submitted for approval via an online survey.

Budget Accordingly

As legendary coach John Wooden, *Purdue '32*, said: "Failure to prepare is preparing to fail." Budgetary planning is especially important for chapters incurring expenses for third-party vendors. Restructuring your budget to account for these expenses is critical. Your chapter's financial advisor or district/regional chief can help restructure your budget, if needed.

Update Leases

House Corporations should strongly consider adding a lease addendum in relation to compliance with the substance-free policy. A [template has been created](#) for your convenience, which can be modified for your chapter.

Maintaining Success

You know the policy; you've implemented the changes and now you must maintain the momentum. If appropriate steps are taken, the Fraternity believes substance-free housing will continue to lead chapters to perform at their highest possible levels long-term. This section covers areas of chapter operations that will require special attention, such as recruiting new members, planning safe events and effectively preparing future leaders.

Recruit Men of Principle

Recruiting new members is about building relationships with men and understanding what they value. While explaining the benefits of joining the Fraternity, you should focus on how this policy makes us different than the "frat" stereotype. In the event the conversation turns to substance-free housing, [here are answers](#) to common questions you may get from potential new members.

Check-In on Your Members

Schedule a membership expectations review with all new and active members once each term. Doing so not only promotes good chapter operations, but also helps members achieve personal growth and accountability. Continue to provide constructive feedback for each member throughout their journey as a Beta.

Report Incidents

Mistakes are going to happen, when they do, timely completing an incident report (the process is reviewed at Keystone and Chapter Presidents Leadership Academy each year) can aid with responses to challenging issues that arise when incidents occur. If you are unsure what justifies the filing of a report, contact your chapter development coordinator.

Understand the Good Samaritan Policy

Members of Beta Theta Pi, through the value of mutual assistance, are called to help others. In no circumstance should someone withhold assistance due to fear of reprisal. To that end, [Good Samaritan policies](#) were adopted to assure members and chapters that helping others in distress should be their first priority.

Plan Safe Events

The goal of the [Safe Event Planning Guide](#) is to help chapters and alumni think critically around event planning. Before every event, run through this checklist and reference campus and IFC policies that govern event planning.



Matt Stranzl, Elon '19

"Having a dry house has given us a significant advantage in recruiting. It has given us respect from school officials and the rest of campus that other organizations lack. It has turned our chapter house into a place centered around meaningful relationships rather than those that are centered around alcoholic consumption."

FAQ

As the Fraternity focuses on the safety of our members and guests, the Fraternity made the thoughtful and courageous choice to expand their substance-free housing policy to include all Beta chapters. This decision was grounded deeply in the feedback and questions of our brothers. The following list of frequently asked questions has been compiled to document the consistent rationale that led to this decision and to help our brothers join the conversation at any point in their Beta experience.

Rationale

Q: Why has Beta adopted this policy change now?

A: Beta is committed to the safety and welfare of our members and guests, and our Trustees have reinforced that commitment by adopting “Home” as a strategic priority for our Fraternity. While creating a sense of home and belonging is not exclusive to a chapter house, many Beta experiences are influenced significantly by the environments in which they occur.

To advance the priority of Home within our Fraternity, the Trustees have authorized the creation of a General Fraternity House Corporation (GFHC) and are exploring elevated housing standards that would establish baselines for health, safety and sustainability in every Beta home. Substance-free housing (SFH) is a critical component of these housing standards and is a strategy that has proven its worth over time in minimizing risk, attracting high caliber men into our chapters and promoting the safety of our members and guests.

First, the timing aligns with Beta’s strategic priorities and the necessary steps that bring them to life. Second, insurance costs have continued to rise in relation to incidents that almost exclusively involve alcohol in Beta’s chapter houses, and policy adoption can place the Fraternity back on the path toward fewer and less severe incidents that will drive down premiums, thereby freeing up precious local chapter and General Fraternity resources for more valuable and worthwhile purposes. Finally, there is important recognition that one common thread exists in the vast majority of fraternity incidents related to hazing, sexual assault, fighting and injuries: alcohol and drug use in the chapter house.

Q: What is the general housing snapshot of Beta’s 138 chapters?

A: Numbers current at time of publication (2019)

- The Fraternity currently has 2,848 bed spaces available to its 10,271 undergraduates (27.7 percent).
- At any given time, the majority of Beta’s undergraduate membership is under the legal age to consume alcohol.
- 99 active chapters (72 percent) reside in some type of Fraternity housing.
- 55 active chapters reside in alumni-owned properties; 53 percent (29) of alumni- owned properties are substance-free.
- 44 active chapters reside in rented or University-owned properties; 77 percent (34) of those are substance-free.
- 63 active chapters reside in substance-free housing, or 64 percent of housed chapters.

Q: Prohibition didn't work and I don't see how SFH is any different. How will the Fraternity deal with the unintended consequences of the party moving to other locations?

A: This policy expansion isn't prohibition, as chapters are still fully empowered to host social events with alcohol. It's simply a decision to remove alcohol from Beta homes. Any individual who chooses to consume alcohol can do so at the litany of establishments that serve alcohol legally.

Q: What about the 21-year-old guy who wants to have a beer in his room on Sundays while he watches a ballgame?

A: If young men "having a beer in their room while watching a ballgame" was a big issue, it's fair to say SFH wouldn't even be on the table. Likewise, regardless of the divergent opinions on the federal drinking age, the fact is that the majority of our chapter members are underage, and those same men make up the vast majority of occupants in our facilities. Simply put, fraternity houses have become incredible incubators for underage men and women to get easy access to alcohol, all the while transferring enormous risk to the organization, undergraduate chapter officers and the volunteer men and women who support them. The Fraternity cannot turn a blind eye to this reality with the belief that "having a beer calmly and quietly in one's room" is the real issue at hand.

The misgivings of this question also rest in the fact that most alumni through the '70s could only buy 3.2 percent beer, while today's alcohol content in beer has more than doubled and is now closer to seven percent. Couple that with the pervasive hard-alcohol culture now on campus, and the suggestion that drinking today is modest in nature just doesn't square with reality.

Q: How is Beta's approach to this topic aligned with the early days and steps taken to launch the Men of Principle initiative?

A: Similar to how the Fraternity took a hard stand in the late 1990s by eliminating alcohol from recruitment, prohibiting the Shep Test and mandating five-person advisory teams, the rationale for launching Men of Principle in the first place was to restore regular order to the Fraternity that had, at least for the prior 20-30 years, been run somewhat loosely with egregious levels of accountability. In our earliest days of observing the cultures of Beta's first three Men of Principle pilot chapters – which was an enunciated goal of the Fraternity: that we would learn best practices from our undergraduates and adopt them into our policy and programmatic formula – it became evident that, overall, Nebraska's substance-free chapter house was superior in the type of Beta experience it fostered.

Q: Is the Fraternity ignoring the reality of college life today with this type of policy?

A: This SFH policy has been driven by consistent data and experience over many years and Beta's results are mirrored by peers who have implemented SFH in their own organizations. Given today's on-campus culture, most argue we would be sticking our heads in the sand if we believe the Fraternity (and Greek life in general) can continue on its current path and all will be OK. The reality is that our educational emphasis and substance-free housing policy for expansions have taken us as far as they can. We must be willing to recognize – based on years of our own data and experiences – that our biggest vulnerabilities are wet, housed chapters.

Q: Won't this policy drive things underground?

A: Moving the social events out of the chapter house either drives them to registered third-party vendors who provide much safer and more controlled environments, or to much smaller venues such as apartments or rental homes within the community that naturally limit the size and scope of social gatherings, while also providing greater transparency than a fraternity basement. Finally, transitioning social events away from a chapter house with large common spaces immediately proximate to many private bedrooms minimizes the likelihood of sexual assault occurring in our Beta homes.

Q: Will substance-free chapter houses create more drunk driving?

A: Unlike prior decades, it has never been easier and less expensive to be transported while impaired, simply by using one's phone to order an Uber or Lyft. Not surprisingly, beyond the fact that responsibility for one's choices and decisions goes with being an adult, the most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported that from 2002 to 2014, there has been a dramatic, steady decline in the rate of drunk driving across America. That same time period mirrors the increasing prevalence of substance-free housing among campuses and fraternities across North America. Interestingly, the greatest declines in drunk driving have occurred in males between the ages of 16 and 24. So, the theory and concern is reasonable, but the facts don't support substance-free housing in fraternity houses as a contributor to drunk driving.

Q: Don't we just need to focus more on education and the responsible use of alcohol? Why won't that work?

A: Undergraduates have been bombarded by alcohol and drug education classes since they were in middle school. They are also required to participate accordingly as a part of their general education health classes as freshmen, not to mention most campuses and/or IFCs require them of their new members. While education is a part of the solution, we do not believe that students are binge-drinking based on their lack of knowledge about the effects of alcohol on their bodies. Facilities in our name that shield chapters and members from any normal state of legal responsibility continue to threaten our organization, and adoption of a SFH policy is a common-sense approach to help shape healthier cultures within our homes.

Q: Doesn't substance-free housing put Beta in a competitive disadvantage when it comes to recruitment and social life?

A: Thankfully, our Fraternity doesn't have to speculate on this matter because Beta's own data over the last 19 years indicates our substance-free housed chapters are wildly successful in recruitment, as well as their social life on campus. In fact, the average chapter size of Beta's substance-free housed chapters is 83 as compared to Beta's 79-man average chapter size for all chapters. In talking with any number of Betas whose chapter house is substance-free, they will argue that their chapter is one of the tops on campus in terms of character, reputation and social calendar – without all of the downsides of a wet house, like being chronically dirty, dealing with never-ending property destruction, being hard to study in, increased risks for hazing and sexual assault, parents not wanting/ allowing their son to live-in, etc. Finally, this is the direction campuses are headed. Assuming a position of leadership on the matter – consistent with Beta's historical reputation – actually gives Beta a competitive advantage.

Q: Why is tobacco included in this policy?

A: Consistent with campus policies that have been in place for more than a decade, the primary concern regarding tobacco relates to damage caused by cigarettes due to fire and smoke. As cited by Beta's insurance carrier, Holmes-Murphy, the two primary drivers of catastrophic destruction to our Beta homes are frozen pipes and open flames. Cigarettes landing in trash cans and couches, among a litany of other possibilities, create harmful circumstances for our chapters, and the Fraternity must do all it can to protect the safety and well-being of all who reside in and visit our facilities



Jeff S. Rundle, Kansas State '03 | Chief Executive Officer, Beta Theta Pi Fraternity

"The overwhelming sentiments from those who have concerns about Beta's substance-free housing policy center around the difficulties associated with change, not that it isn't the right thing to do."