



# Substance-Free HOUSING Policy Expansion



BETA THETA PI FRATERNITY

# FAQ

As the Fraternity focuses on the safety of our members and guests, the Board of Trustees 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.

● ● ●

*“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.”*

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. Beta has implemented a substance-free housing policy in 64 percent of its housed chapters to date and, for a number of reasons, now is the right time to complete the transition for our remaining Beta homes.

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. This is an important moment for our Fraternity to demonstrate true leadership to the entire Greek community through thoughtful and strategic action aimed at keeping our members and guests safe.

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

- A:**
- The Fraternity currently has 2,848 bed spaces available to its 10,271 undergraduates (27.7 percent).
  - At any given time, more than 60 percent of Beta’s undergraduate membership is under the legal age to consume alcohol.
  - 99 active chapters or colonies (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: What impact has substance-free housing had on the Fraternity over the last 15 years?**

**A:** Given Beta’s substance-free housing expansion policy of the last 15 years, a litany of data has been researched and analyzed that summarizes Beta’s success in this space when comparing wet and housed chapters to those that are housed substance-free:

	NON-SFH CHAPTERS	SFH CHAPTERS
<b>NUMBER OF CHAPTERS</b>	36	63
<b>AVERAGE CHAPTER SIZE</b>	81	83
<b>ACADEMICS</b>	3,249	3,258
<b>CONDUCT &amp; ACCOUNTABILITY</b>		
Closed Chapters (Since 2005)	38 (88%)	5 (12%)
Reorganizations (Since 2005)	15 (83%)	3 (17%)
<b>INSURANCE PAYOUTS</b>		
No. of Insurance Claims (2013-17)	25 (63%)	14 (37%)
Total Payouts (2013-17)	\$1,247,681 (95%)	\$69,839 (5%)
Average Per Claim	\$49,907	\$4,988
Total Payouts Since 1998	\$3,581,317 (94%)	\$232,032 (6%)

Beta’s liability insurance premium has doubled since 2013.

**Q: What is the rationale behind the two-and-a-half-year window to reach adoption?**

**A:** True cultural change is slow and difficult, and it often requires education, conversation and buy-in for it to have staying power. By announcing a future date of adoption, the Trustees are taking an important position of principled leadership and then providing appropriate time to work with all chapters and house corporations that would be impacted by the policy to create a strategy to achieve successful adoption. We realize that each path to adoption will be unique and that this policy will touch many aspects of chapter and alumni life including recruitment, alumni relations and operations of the chapter house. The two-and-a-half-year window will also create opportunity for early adopters to move more quickly, as well as allow a generation of men who chose the wet chapter house experience to complete their undergraduate years in the spirit by which they joined. We will provide coaching and resources to chapters and volunteers to assist them as they recruit to a new chapter house experience and market the benefits that come from safer and more sustainable homes.

**FACTS**

.....  
 Since 2005, 88% of Beta’s chapter closures – and 83% of chapter reorganizations – have been wet-housed chapters.



● ● ●

*“We have a duty to protect the future of this Fraternity.”*

— Bob Schmese, Wisconsin '83  
General Fraternity President

**Q: Is this an overreach? Not every chapter operates like Penn State did.**

**A:** The Fraternity has nearly 20 years of experience dealing with substance-free housing given the Board of Trustees’ decision to require all expansions to operate as such beginning in the late ’90s and early ’00s. This policy simply improves alignment within the Fraternity. Our former Penn State undergraduate members violated a number of policies flagrantly, including the anti-hazing and substance-free housing policies and in many ways reinforced the case for strong and consistent standards across the Fraternity. While this housing policy is not a silver bullet, Beta’s own data is clear that removing alcohol from Beta homes makes our chapters, members and guests safer.

**Q: Does the Board of Trustees have the authority to make this policy?**

**A:** Yes. The authority to make housing policies that support the safety and well-being of the Fraternity is provided for in The Code of Beta Theta Pi. This is also consistent with the Board of Trustees’ precedent examples of enacting Beta’s insurance program in the 1980s (which included eliminating kegs and little sister programs, scavenger hunts, etc., among other high-risk behaviors), launching the Men of Principle initiative and its programmatic and policy initiatives in the late 1990s, adopting the early 2000s’ forced-consumption chapter closure policy, and implementing the substance-free housing policy in 2003.

**Q: Penn State was supposed to be substance-free and that didn’t work, so how would this policy respond to that situation?**

**A:** Like laws in society and rules within any organization or institution, adherence is not utopic. One need look no further than Beta’s existing policies on academics, social activities and financial obligations to know that, even though every individual and chapter doesn’t live up to every standard with perfection and at all times, rules and expectations are necessary if we’re to be an organization worthy of our name. No different than the workplace, family life or one’s existence in society, having rules of behavior and conduct requires individual sacrifice, but it is for the good of the order and necessary to live together in harmony. In Beta, chapters on a rolling basis and in a multitude of areas do live up to the standards set by the Fraternity, but it’s not hard to understand that their performance would likely be much different without our policies in place.

Ultimately, the outlier reality of Penn State being a “substance-free” chapter cannot overcome the summary data collected over 15 years that verifies substance-free chapters are safer than those that are not. From a policy standpoint, “perfection” cannot be the enemy of “really, really good.”

**Q: Are we punishing chapters that have managed alcohol well in their houses by implementing this policy?**

**A:** The Fraternity’s data suggests that virtually every housed, wet chapter has or is struggling with the responsible use of alcohol in its chapter house. This is not a punitive step but rather a decision to support our brothers with both policy and resources that will increase the safety and sustainability of their Beta experience.

**Q: Do Phi Delta Theta and Farmhouse have difficulties enforcing this? How would Beta’s policy or approach be different?**

**A:** Enforcement of any policy requires leadership at the General Fraternity level, and support and buy-in at the local level. While those fraternities’ histories both chronicle successes and challenges, their level of struggle isn’t any greater than that which we spend reactively responding to crisis and fallout from incidents occurring because of alcohol in our facilities. Similarly, we should be careful over-weighting their “difficulties” through second- and third-hand commentary, as predisposed feelings of competitiveness and male comparison are natural but oftentimes not fully informed. While enforcement concerns should continue to be explored with alumni and undergraduate leaders of those two fraternities (soon to also include Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity), Beta’s data validates the benefits of SFH and the fact that enforcement requires ongoing and diligent attention. We already know that enforcement of any policy, no matter the topic (academics, finances, attendance, risk management, etc.), requires effort, but the results can be significant and positive for our members and the larger Fraternity.

**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. Compare the data of Beta chapters that are already substance-free against those that are wet: substance-free chapters outperform in virtually every metric, including risk management issues outside their chapter houses.

**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 more than 60 percent 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 shields 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.

**FACTS**

94% of the Fraternity’s insurance losses over the last 20 years have come from Beta’s wet-housed chapters, causing premiums to more than double in the last four years.





*“This is also so directly tied to sexual assault. We must do all we can to eliminate the risks. And after all of the analysis, hand-wringing and fear of failure, we just have to do the right thing.”*

*— Ted Haile, Georgia Tech '75  
Vice President, Board of Trustees*

**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. In addition, the progress we have made the last 15 years toward SFH in our Fraternity has been intentional, methodical, scaled over time and the result of a blended approach of education, policy and resource allocation – all things that were key ingredients of our early efforts with Men of Principle.

**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 15 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. With more than 30 Greek community-wide suspensions currently in affect – and growing daily – many of our host campuses are pursuing similar policies and enforcing broad restrictions on the role that substances play in the Greek experience and student living environment. The reality is that our educational emphasis and substance-free housing policy for expansions have taken us as far as they can. Alcohol in our remaining chapter houses presents a significant threat to the safety and viability of our Fraternity and we continue to risk more injuries, sexual assaults, deaths and Beta headlines if we don’t take a principled stand. 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:** Fortunately, that hasn’t been the case with Beta’s 63 substance-free housed chapters. In fact, an analysis of Beta’s substance-free housed chapters suggests just the opposite: high-caliber men are recruited who manage their personal and chapter risks outside the chapter house far more maturely and successfully than their wet-housed chapter peers. In addition, 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: Won’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 15 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*.

**FACTS**

.....

With 60% of Beta’s undergraduate membership below the legal drinking age, fraternity houses have become shields for underage men and women to get easy access to alcohol, all the while transferring enormous risk to the organization, fellow undergraduate chapter officers and the volunteer men and women who support them.



*“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.”*



—Jeff Rundle, Kansas State '03  
Executive Director



**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.

**Q: Are you kidding me? Our alumni and chapter members will never support it.**

**A:** While any reform measure like this may invoke similar initial reactions, the reality is that dozens of Beta chapters and Greek communities already operate with similar SFH policies and they do so with considerable success: Cornell, Florida State, Iowa, Iowa State, Kansas State, Kentucky, Miami, Michigan, Michigan State, Missouri, MIT, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Purdue, SMU, Southern California, TCU, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Virginia Tech, Washington State and Wichita State, among others.

If there’s any consistent theme of individuals refusing to support the Fraternity, the trend has been in terms of alumni refusing to volunteer and offer financial support to their chapters because they do not want to assume personal risk being associated with the volatility of a wet house, nor do they and/or their Beta Sweetheart want to “throw good money after bad” given the toll substances and related behaviors take on the chapter house. The general insinuation of alumni and parents across North America seems to indicate that more of them would be involved as volunteer advisors and house corporation members – and provide more financial support – if our Beta homes were substance-free.

**Q: Doesn’t the timing of the SFH announcement seem conspicuous given the deadline to submit Convention legislation just one day earlier?**

**A:** While the timing of the announcement in relation to the legislative deadline may have caused confusion, it had no impact on the ability for Convention delegates to weigh in on the Trustees’ decision. The Trustees adopted a policy in the name of the health and safety of our members – as they have been empowered to do by both The Code and Convention – but did not modify The Code in any way. Only Code amendments are required to be submitted by February 1st annually. In fact, the Trustees were prepared to make a decision during their fall board meeting in early November based on the feedback provided by Beta brothers throughout Convention and the fall term, but decided to hold off in favor of conducting additional feedback calls with some three dozen house corporations to gauge their perspectives and concerns. That data was then woven into the Trustees’ deliberations in late January during

the winter board meeting. Given the timeline necessary to prepare announcement materials, it was deemed fitting and important symbolically to share the Trustees' larger strategic plan on February 2, the one-year anniversary of the events that led to Tim Piazza's death.

**Q: How can we be sure the Board of Trustees didn't make this decision in a vacuum?**

**A:** With nearly 20 years of experience since the Men of Principle initiative was launched, including 15 years of data related to substance-free housing, two years of strategic planning, and a full year of reflection and analysis since the tragic death of Tim Piazza, it is safe to say that the 12-man Board of Trustees has had access to a voluminous amount of data from which to draw their conclusions. Including men from all regions of the continent, and hailing from chapters large and small, housed (10) and unhoused (2), substance-free (5) and not (5), current and former chapter counselors, house corporation presidents and district chiefs, young and old, singles, husbands and fathers, the blend of perspectives and experiences is wide and deep within the Trustees' make-up.

Just as importantly, these men have made extraordinary personal sacrifices and commitments in both time and treasure for the welfare of our Great and Good Fraternity, as their primary two objectives are the safety of our 10,000+ undergraduate Betas, and a rewarding brotherhood they believe all undergraduates deserve. While some may criticize the Trustees simply because of the leadership and governing role they serve, others have argued that Beta has not acted quickly enough in the wake of Tim Piazza's death. The Trustees have resisted making any knee-jerk reactions in order to fully study the campus climate, our Beta culture and the future of the North American fraternity community. In the end, they believe substance-free housing is where Greek life continues to move and Beta needs to play a leadership role in its transition.

**Q: What next?**

**A:** A lot of work is ahead of the Fraternity on this and so many other matters. While brotherly patience is needed by all as plans, programs and resources are developed, the Board of Trustees is committed to ongoing collaboration with Beta undergraduates and volunteers as the Fraternity addresses the significant challenges before it. A historic level of human and financial resources will be required of the organization as it makes this substance-free housing transition, and the Board of Trustees is determined to meet those responsibilities.

*“As a house corporation president who was skeptical of the General Fraternity and an original opponent of substance-free housing, I’ve seen the positive results first-hand in my own chapter. That’s why I cannot in good conscience be a part of the leadership of our Great and Good Fraternity if we choose to ignore the very-telling data and facts before us. Bottom line? It works. We must do it for the safety of our young men and their friends. It’s not just the right time; it’s the right THING to do.”*

– Cary Wood, Purdue '88  
House Corporation President;  
Vice President, Board of Trustees



**FACTS**

The average chapter size and GPAs of Beta's substance-free housed chapters outperform the Fraternity's wet-housed chapters with a fraction of the risk for injury to Beta undergraduates and their guests.