



USING POLICY TO EMPOWER & PROTECT GREENFIELD (WI) FIRE DEPARTMENT

The 50 members of the Greenfield (WI) Fire Department protect a population of about 37,000 just outside Milwaukee. The department began using Lexipol in 2016.

THE CHALLENGE

For almost 10 years, it had been a goal of the Greenfield Fire Department (GFD) to rewrite its policy manual. But the situation had never been critical—until 2011.

Around that time, an upcoming exodus of the department's senior members meant that half of the department's 50 career positions would turn over in the next five years.

As new members started, the lack of policy was sorely obvious. "The biggest complaint from our field training officers and recruits was that we did not have a policy manual," says Chief Jon Cohn. "Our policies were relatively nonexistent. And what we did have was more like memos than policies, often a reaction to a particular incident rather than a well thought-out policy."

But developing a new policy manual is no easy task, so for several years after identifying the need, the department struggled to find the right way to proceed.

THE SOLUTION

The answer came in the form of Lexipol's Wisconsin Fire Policies and Daily Training Bulletin service. Right away, Chief Cohn saw that Lexipol delivered solutions the GFD could not develop in-house.

"Take a battalion chief, give them 100 hours to develop policies, and see what you get," Chief Cohn says. "Even if they're able to write the policies—which I do not think most organizations could do—you would not have a mobile app, you would not have policy updates, you would not have the assurance the policies are compliant with state and federal laws, and you would not have a training module—or all the other add-ons that make Lexipol a good product."

These considerations are critical when allocating funds for purchasing Lexipol, because many departments do not realize the resources they are wasting when they struggle to maintain policies. "Don't look at the raw cost," Chief Cohn says. "Look at the value and the protection your organization is getting."

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The GFD reviewed and customized the Lexipol policies, then gave members about 45 days to review and acknowledge them. At first, some members were hesitant. “For an organization like us, with no policies or very outdated ones, it is a big shock,” Chief Cohn says. “People were afraid that discipline was going to increase. You have to remind people that the nature of your organization does not change just because you implement policy; it just helps us all understand what’s right, what’s wrong, and the boundaries. Now that it’s in place, no one would disagree that we’re better because we have it.”

Following the release of the policies, the GFD began issuing Lexipol’s Daily Training Bulletins (DTBs) each month. “They are really quick, reinforceable lessons to make sure that the policies remain fresh,” Chief Cohn says. “They promote conversation among the members, and sometimes it helps us as chief officers to realize that we need to further reinforce the topic.”

The GFD also uses Lexipol’s Knowledge Management System to store forms and checklists, which are linked to the appropriate policy. The department even added its Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). “We always have to look things up to know what is in the CBA,” Chief Cohn says. “Now we have the CBA on our smartphones and it is even searchable.”

Recently, the GFD added Lexipol’s Fire Procedures to its subscription. “If we use even one procedure, it is worth the money,” Chief Cohn says. “They will give us a huge

jump start on the standardized practice, and then we can incorporate our regional or department specifics.”

THE RESULTS

Lexipol proved essential in helping the GFD create an up-to-date policy manual. But Chief Cohn stresses the other elements of the product are equally important. “There is no way we could have built what we have on our own, and there is no way we could have continued to maintain it,” he says. “On top of that, the policies have been legally vetted, and there is an app, DTBs, policy acknowledgments and archives.”



He points to one example of the benefit Lexipol provides: “Recently we unfortunately had a needlestick, an exposure, and we were able to open the policy on a smartphone right at the scene and make sure that everything was done right. It put everyone on the same page.”

Today, Chief Cohn sees Lexipol as an integral part of the GFD’s organizational culture, which is centered on the motto “Doing the right things.” The structure provided by the policies supports good decision-making and empowers the members to live up to the department motto.

“Having boundaries does not mean not thinking,” Chief Cohn says. “We want our firefighters to provide great customer service, to show compassion. We had good organizational culture before we had Lexipol, but the boundaries the policies provide help our members take appropriate risks to do the right things.”