New manual lists policies for BR Police Department

By STEVE WHEELEER
Advocate staff writer

For the first time in 20 years, the Baton Rouge Police Department has updated its rules and regulations with a new Policies and Procedures Manual to guide officers in their daily duties.

The telephone book-sized manual, which has been in the making for more than 18 months, will go into effect in the next few months, Police Chief Greg Phares said.

“We realize no written policy can cover every situation,” Phares said, “but if you’re going to set standards for officers, we should clearly let them know in writing what we expect of them, as well as what they have a right to expect from the administration.”

The manual is quite detailed.

Major sections of the policy include duties of each rank of officer, extra-duty jobs, military and sick leave, use of deadly and non-lethal force, vehicle pursuits, firearms, vehicle use, media relations and procedures regarding arrests, traffic, communications, field work, investigations and special response situations.

The policy’s disciplinary code provides that officers may be punished only for one of the following reasons: violation of state, local or federal law; “conduct so offensive it would bring scorn and ridicule upon the department”; incompetence; or for any violation of written or verbal rules, policy, procedures or orders.

The code spells out the possible punishments, ranging from a letter in the officer’s personnel file to suspension or dismissal.

A police officer’s bill of rights is included, spelling out the rights of officers under investigation and in other cases.

The policy provides that the primary weapon of the department is the .40-caliber semi-automatic pistol, but that other
For the first time, we have a comprehensive policy that sets out policy on most routine police operations.

— Police Chief Greg Phares

reasonably believe that someone is in "immediate and apparent danger" of great bodily harm or death and that deadly force is the "only prudent preventable measure available."

"Deadly force shall not be justified merely in the protection of property, nor in the prevention of escape by a prisoner or felon," the policy says.

The manual also contains the specific and detailed guideline saying when officers can and can't continue vehicle pursuits.

"For the first time, we have a comprehensive policy that sets out policy on most routine police operations," Phares said.

The last set of rules for police officers was drafted in the early to mid-1970s, Phares said.

The new manual was developed during the past 18 months by a series of committees, Phares said. The committees were composed of officers in all ranks and in all divisions, he said.

Once the committees came up with a draft, Phares said he reviewed the manual.

"I made some changes, but not many," the chief said.

Phares said although the manual is complete, there are still more steps to be taken before it is distributed to officers.

"We're asking that the Municipal Fire and Police Civil Service Board and the (Metro) Council adopt it," the chief said.

Phares said his command staff and representatives of the Baton Rouge Union of Police Local 237 have reviewed the manual.

"The administration and the union are substantially in agreement. Obviously, we're not in agreement on each and every item," Phares said.

Police Union President Joan Dipaola described the manual as a "good start," and said she hopes it will be reviewed and kept current.

"I don't agree with everything in it, but the administration was fair in handling this," she said. "I think they were as fair as they could be."

Asked how officers on the street would accept the manual, she said, "We've said all along you give us the rules and we'll play by them. I think they'll be OK with it."

Phares said once the manual is distributed to officers, they will need time to read it and learn the new rules.

Mayor Tom Ed McHugh said he is pleased the department has developed the manual, adding it is one of the steps required for the department to earn accreditation.