



Policing Policies in West Chester, PA: **West Chester Police Department Statement and FAQs**

 Posted on June 23, 2020 by Chief James Morehead

The tragedy in Minneapolis has impacted our community, our state and the country. The images on the video are deeply disturbing and difficult to watch. We know that the actions, and inaction, by the officers involved have cast a shadow of distrust over all officers nationwide.

We, the West Chester Police Department, stand behind our mission: We exist to preserve life and property, to enforce the law, to solve community problems, and to protect the right of all citizens to live in a safe, peaceful environment. We are committed, as we always have been, to training our officers to fulfill that mission to the best of our ability.

We have received many inquiries from those within and outside of our community about some of our policies and procedures. These are answers to some of the most common questions.

1. Are the police officers in the West Chester Police Department being trained to de-escalate altercations by using peaceful conflict resolution strategies?

West Chester Police officers complete initial training that includes de-escalation, mental health de-escalation, and unbiased policing while attending the police academy. De-escalation training teaches officers to attempt to resolve situations using verbal skills rather than force. If force is necessary, officers are taught to resort to the least amount of force necessary in order to gain control or stop an action. West Chester Police are in the process of receiving refresher training in these topics, along with legal training on the Fourth Amendment and the most up-to-date related caselaw.

2. Are the police officers in the West Chester Police Department prohibited from using carotid restraints (chokeholds, strangleholds, etc.)?

The use of a chokehold, whether applied by the hands, other body part, or a weapon, is prohibited by longstanding West Chester Police Department policy unless deadly force is warranted to protect life.

3. Are the police officers in the West Chester Police Department required to intervene if they witness another officer using excessive force? Will officers be reprimanded if they fail to intervene?

West Chester Police Department policy provides that any officer who observes another officer using force clearly beyond that which is objectively reasonable under the circumstances shall intercede, when feasible, to prevent the use of such excessive force, so long as doing so does not pose a safety risk. Officers shall immediately report these observations to a supervisor and document the observations prior to the end of shift. A violation of policy, including failure to intervene, will be investigated and an officer will be disciplined or fired if policy is violated.

4. Are the officers in the West Chester Police Department required to give a verbal warning to citizens before drawing their weapon or using force?

Officers are trained that giving verbal warnings or commands are always an officer's first option before drawing a weapon or using force. However, every incident is handled on a case-by-case basis based on the facts known to the officer in that incident. The officer must balance the ability and time necessary to provide a warning with the imminent danger and risk of serious physical injury or death faced by both the officer and the involved citizens. As the United States Supreme Court has stated, "police officers are often forced to make split-second judgments — in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving — about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation." (*Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386, 397 (1989)).

5. Are the officers in the West Chester Police Department required to report each time they threaten to or use force on citizens?

Police officers understand they have been entrusted with the authority to lawfully use force to protect life and property and to apprehend criminal offenders. Therefore, the Department properly documents and reviews each use of force to maintain public confidence and trust. Police officers are required to report any physical contact likely to cause pain or injury and each time they draw and point a weapon at a citizen.

6. Are the officers in the West Chester Police Department trained to perform and seek necessary medical action after using force?

Police officers receive training in CPR, use of an AED and medical training in the police academy. They receive refresher training in these areas every other year per the regulations of the Pennsylvania Council on Police Training. Officers are responsible for providing and obtaining medical aid for individuals who complain of, or show signs of injury, as a result of any use of force by an officer. Officers will transport the individual to a medical treatment facility or request an ambulance and begin medical evaluation and care of such individuals as soon as practical.

7. Is there an early intervention system enforced to correct officers who use force?

The West Chester Police Department employs a computer system that documents all uses of force, along with citizen complaints, motor vehicle collisions and vehicle pursuits. The system is monitored by police staff when an officer is involved in these types of incidents. Additionally, every use of force is reviewed immediately by a direct supervisor and then again quarterly by an internal committee to ensure compliance with policy. Any use of force outside of policy is sent to the Department's Professional Standards Office for investigation.

8. Do the West Chester Police use body cameras?

The West Chester Police Department received Commonwealth of Pennsylvania funding to implement a body worn camera (BWC) program in late 2019. The delivery and use of BWCs began in January of 2020 for the Department.

The West Chester Police Department requires that all field operations personnel wear a BWC. Spare BWCs are available for other officers to utilize when required by policy. Officers are required to record situations where they encounter the public and an arrest, detention, or use of force is likely.

The BWC policy was developed in accordance with the best practices determined by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice Body Worn Camera Tool Kit, and other national and state resources.

9. What can I do as a concerned citizen?

Throughout the year, the West Chester Police Department plans and hosts various community activities and programs to engage with the community. These events include our festivals and National Night Out Against Crime. We are currently in the process of growing our community outreach programs and our community policing initiatives. It is important that members of the community stay connected by attending meetings, viewing updates on our websites (both our Departmental website and press release website) and following us on our social media platforms.

I and Mayor Dianne Herrin have an open-door policy and we invite all members of the community to reach out to us.

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