Pledging is out at 2 fraternities

By Craig Wilson
USA TODAY

Becoming a frat man is becoming easier.

Two national fraternities — Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE), the USA's largest, and Zeta Beta Tau (ZBT) — have decided to end their pledging systems, which include hazing.

Two other fraternities from the two dozen nationwide, Kappa Delta Rho and Alpha Phi Alpha, are studying the possibility of abolishing pledge systems. And the National Interfraternity Conference, which launches a nationwide “Campaign Against Hazing” Friday, has asked all fraternities to examine their pledge systems.

ZBT's and TKE's actions, approved by the fraternities' national committees, follow at least four alcohol-related fraternity deaths last year.

Their decisions will affect thousands of college men. More than 6,000 pledged TKE's 300 chapters last year; 1,500 joined ZBT's 97 chapters.

ZBT chapters at Ohio State and Alfred (N.Y.) University have been closed for violating the new system this month.

"For decades we've tried to control hazing and couldn't do it," says Dr. Ronald J. Taylor, a national vice president of ZBT.

"So the only thing left to do was to remove the window of opportunity for it — pledging."

Under the new bylaws, men rushing either ZBT or TKE and invited to join will be inducted almost immediately, rather than serving as a pledge.

There will be no pledge week. No drinking binges, no public humiliation.

ZBT's new system is now in effect. TKE houses have until fall 1991; alumni will be on site to assist and monitor.

The change isn't greeted with open arms by all alumni or older fraternity members. Many see pledging and hazing as honored traditions.

"But the fact is, the fraternity must change with the times," Taylor says.

While Maurice E. Littlefield, executive director of Sigma Nu, says it's too early to say if Sigma Nu will do away with its pledging system altogether, "We're giving it (restructuring the pledge system) a lot of consideration."

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Lawsuits cut school activities

By Pat Ordovensky
USA TODAY

School activities, from football to field trips and proms to pompons, are being cut back by the specter of lawsuits and the high cost of insurance, say two surveys out Tuesday.

More than half (58 percent) of the 191 high school principals polled by the National Association of Secondary School Principals say activities have been restricted for legal or insurance reasons. Most often cited: gym classes, field trips, vocational shops, science labs.

A third of 290 school lawyers polled by the National School Boards Association say they've seen programs changed for liability reasons; 17 percent say they've been involved in suits or out-of-court settlements. Most often affected: physical education classes, student travel, playground procedures, the use of volunteers.

Both surveys were commissioned by the American Tort Reform Association.