

Water Rescue Grant – Program Accomplishments

1. Water Rescue Responses

- a. Strong preparedness and ability to respond to incidents – July 29, 2025, Clearwater Ferry Boat Crash – 1 dead, 10 injured and 50+ evaluated.
- b. Fire/EMS responded to 687 Water Rescue Incidents in 2021; 632 in 2022; 642 in 2023; 790 in 2024 (increase due to Hurricanes Helene and Milton – this does not include evacuations or other storm-related incidents) and 525, year to date.

2. In coordination with the Cities, Fire Districts and EMS Funds, the following Water Rescue resources were added between 2017 and 2025:

- a. Added 7 Wave Runner / Jet Skis strategically placed to affect beach rescues.
- b. Added 6 Rescue Boats strategically placed across the County.
- c. Established 8 Water Extrication / Rapid Diver Units countywide.
- d. Added a North County Dive Team.

3. Collaboration and Coordination

- a. Standing Water Rescue Committee with coordination of joint training programs.
- b. Coordination of standardized equipment, technology and rescue techniques.
- c. Collaboration and coordination with Pinellas County Sheriff, US Coast Guard, and Eckerd College Search & Rescue.
- d. Unified PCSO / Fire / EMS Water Rescue Plan utilized for Hurricanes Helene and Milton, and a new Unified Command Center and situational awareness tools have been developed to operate within the County EOC.

4. Initial and Refresher Joint Training

- a. Maritime Search and Rescue Course.
- b. Public Safety Rescue Boat Operator's Course.
- c. Public Safety Rescue Diver and Rapid Diver Courses.
- d. Technical Rescue Swiftwater Training.

5. Standardization of Equipment and Advanced Technology

- a. Forward-looking Infrared Cameras (FLIR) / Night Vision.
- b. Side Sonar.
- c. Noise-cancelling Radio Headsets.
- d. Rapid Diver Equipment.
- e. Urban Flooding Jon Boats.

Note – these were used extensively during Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

6. Operating and Maintenance

- a. Operating and Maintenance funds have helped support the Countywide cooperation and collaboration among the departments.
- b. The “closest unit responds” regardless of jurisdiction is based upon the Automatic Aid Agreement. The funding for maintenance and fuel has supported an on-going countywide approach.