



FIRE CHIEF'S ASSOCIATION

PINELLAS COUNTY FLORIDA

August 25, 2016

Mr. Craig Hare, Director
Pinellas County EMS & Fire Administration
12490 Ulmerton Road – Suite 134
Largo, Florida 33774

Re: Water Rescue Position Statement

Dear Mr. Hare,

Thank you for requesting the Pinellas County Fire Chiefs Association (PCFCA) to establish a committee for Water Rescue. As you know, the committee has met many times over the last year working on a comprehensive plan for Water Rescue improvements. The committee has made great progress, however, more work is needed while high priority needs are addressed.

The Fire Chiefs Association offers the following position statements to convey the consensus of the Fire Service in Pinellas County regarding Water Rescue improvements to assist Pinellas County and other government entities with setting priorities for funding and improvement projects:

Background:

1. It is important to note the Cities and Fire Districts have provided water rescue through their Fire Rescue departments for the last 20-30 years or more. Throughout that time, the Fire Service has worked closely with law enforcement, the US Coast Guard, and Florida Fish & Wildlife.
2. While each community has done a very good job in preparing for and responding to water rescue emergencies, the County would benefit from having a comprehensive countywide program that includes Fire Rescue agencies; and strengthening the partnerships with the US Coast Guard, law enforcement agencies and other response agencies.
3. Water Rescue assets and response configurations are varied and complex due to the many types of hazards and situations faced by Fire Rescue personnel (ocean rescue in the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay; shipboard and marina firefighting; surface and dive operations on the gulf, bay lakes, canals, intercostal waterways; mass casualty preparedness for multi-passenger vessels and commercial aircraft; capability to operate in heavy weather conditions; surface rescue on retention ponds; underwater operations from sinking and submerged vehicles; boating accidents; distressed boaters and swimmers; drowning and rip currents).
4. There are several gaps that need to be addressed as a high priority including a marine unit dedicated to Lake Tarpon; Fire Rescue Boats capable of firefighting, multi-victim rescue, and heavy weather operations in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Clearwater and St. Pete Beach; and improved training and capability for surface and subsurface operations.

President
Richard Graham

Vice President
Joe Acetto

Secretary/Treasurer
Tom Jamison

Director at Large
Heather Burford

5. Working together and combining various funding sources to make county-wide improvements is the best approach to maximize the partnerships and value for citizens, visitors and taxpayers.

Recommendations:

1. The PCFCA supports the use of British Petroleum (BP) settlement funds as submitted by the East Lake Fire District and the City of St. Pete Beach. These requests support high priority projects that will rapidly improve response capability and geographic coverage. There are no other funding sources dedicated or identified for the East Lake marine unit and there are inadequate funds available from the City of St. Pete Beach and County EMS to fully fund the Fire Rescue Boat in Pass-a-Grille.
2. The PCFCA supports the Board of County Commissioners, through its EMS Authority, to establish the two-year Water Rescue Plan by Resolution. The Resolution provides for much needed funding from County EMS to the Cities and Fire Districts to support operations, maintenance, equipment improvements, and expanded training.
3. The PCFCA supports the specific partnerships between the EMS Authority and the Cities of Clearwater and St. Pete Beach to combine City and EMS funding sources to establish Fire Rescue Boats capable of multi-victim rescue, the ability to operate in heavy weather, and firefighting capability. These capabilities do not currently exist and these two projects are a high priority for the 2016-2017 fiscal year.
4. The PCFCA supports the continued expansion of surface and subsurface water rescue and/or diver capabilities, including equipment and training to perform rapid and safe rescue and/or dive operations for sinking and submerged vehicles.
5. The multi-agency Water Rescue committee will continue to work with EMS & Fire Administration staff to realize the goals of the two-year plan and complete a comprehensive plan that includes all stakeholders.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts of the Board of County Commissioners and County Administration regarding several current initiatives including support for the Technical Rescue Agreement; providing protective equipment for active assailant preparedness; standardizing medical supply gear for all Fire Rescue agencies and Sunstar; and improving the Continuing Medical Education program.

Please contact me if there are any questions,

Sincerely,



Richard E. Graham
President
Pinellas County Fire Chiefs association

cc: Commissioner Charlie Justice, Chairman, Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners
Mayor Travis Palladeno, Chairman, Pinellas County EMS Advisory Council
Mark Woodard, County Administrator
John Bennett, Assistant County Administrator