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REPORT NO. 2025-05

TO: Jim Fogarty, Bureau Director
Department of Safety and Emergency Services

FROM: Melissa Dondero, Inspector General/Chief Audit Executive *md*
Division of Inspector General

DIST: Ken Burke, CPA, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
The Honorable Chair and Members of the Board of County Commissioners
Barry Burton, County Administrator
Lourdes Benedict, Assistant County Administrator

SUBJECT: Follow-Up Audit of the Sunstar Ambulance Contract

DATE: April 18, 2025

This memo serves to inform you that the Division of Inspector General completed a Follow-Up Audit of the Sunstar Ambulance Contract. The purpose of our follow-up review was to determine the status of previous recommendations for improvement.

The objectives of the original audit were to:

1. Determine whether contractual obligations (performance standards) were met by Sunstar and reviewed by Pinellas County (County) management.
2. Determine whether payments requested by and disbursed to Sunstar were accurate and appropriate.

To determine the current status of our previous recommendations, we surveyed and/or interviewed management to determine the actual actions taken to implement recommendations for improvement. We performed testing to verify that management's action plans have effectively addressed the opportunities for improvement (OFIs). The extent and timing of testing was based on the significance of the OFIs and management's planned implementation completion date.

Our follow-up audit was conducted in accordance with the *Global Internal Audit Standards* of The Institute of Internal Auditors and the *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General* of the Association of Inspectors General. Accordingly, it included such tests of records and other auditing procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

Our follow-up testing was performed during the month of April 2025. The original audit period was from October 1, 2017, through September 30, 2023. However, transactions and processes reviewed were not limited by the audit period.

Of the three recommendations in the original audit report, we determined that two have been implemented, and one has been partially implemented. The status of each recommendation is presented in this follow-up report.

Original Report Reference

To view the original report (Report No.: 2024-03), published in the report section of our website, please use the following link:

[Report No. 2024-03: Audit of Sunstar Ambulance Contract](#)

Recommendation Implementation Status

The table below reports on the status of management's action plans to implement the recommendations contained in the original audit report.

OFI	PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION	STATUS
1	<i>Response Time Compliance</i>	
A	<p>For the current and future ambulance contracts, coordinate with Sunstar to analyze and determine the following to increase emergency, non-emergency, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) District transport response times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The appropriate number of emergency vehicles required to successfully achieve contractual response time compliance. Efficient emergency vehicle staging locations to ensure County residents are transported safely and in a timely manner. The number of full-time medical employees required to staff emergency vehicles and optimize performance efficiently. 	<p>Implemented</p> <p>The Department of Safety and Emergency Services (SES) and Sunstar increased the efficiency of emergency, non-emergency, and EMS District transport response times by implementing the following:</p> <p><u><i>Vehicle Inventory</i></u> Beginning October 1, 2024, Sunstar was required to increase the number of emergency vehicles from 96 to 111. This included the addition of 10 Basic Life Support interfacility ambulances and 5 Advanced Life Support ambulances over the duration of the new contract.</p> <p><u><i>Vehicle Staging Locations</i></u> SES consistently reviews staging locations to ensure ambulances are located in high-demand sites to increase transport timeliness.</p> <p><u><i>Compliance Response Percentage</i></u> Sunstar and SES contractually agreed to reduce the monthly compliance requirements for the three response</p>

OFI	PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION	STATUS
		<p>time categories, which led to the overall increase in the following response times:</p> <p>Emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Audit (91% Requirement) - 0% Compliance • Follow-Up (90% Requirement) - 100% Compliance <p>Non-Emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Audit (93% Requirement) - 91.67% Compliance • Follow-Up (90% Requirement) - 100% Compliance <p>EMS Districts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Audit (90% Requirement) - 42.96% Compliance • Follow-Up (88% Requirement) - 92.11% Compliance
B	<p>For the current and future ambulance contracts, coordinate with Sunstar and County Traffic Management to obtain the Emergency Vehicle Preemption traffic light system to utilize within Sunstar emergency vehicles for critical situations. This could decrease response times for life-threatening transports and assist Sunstar in completing its contractual obligations.</p>	<p>Partially Implemented</p> <p>The EMS Authority, along with traffic engineers from the City of Clearwater, St. Petersburg, and the County have agreed to utilize Temple Glance as the Traffic Preemptive System. Installation in Fire Rescue and 911 ambulances began in early March 2025 for 212 emergency vehicles. In parallel, the Traffic Engineers/Signal Shops will install 272 intersections starting in April 2025. The system is anticipated to be phased in over the next 6-9 months.</p>
2	<i>Paramedic Staffing Compliance</i>	
A	<p>For the current and future ambulance contracts, inquire whether Sunstar is periodically monitoring paramedic workforce levels and competitive pay rates to ensure</p>	<p>Implemented</p> <p>For October 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025, we determined that Sunstar exceedingly employed the</p>

OFI	PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATION	STATUS
	they are actively attracting experienced and knowledgeable paramedics and retaining talented employees.	number of paramedics and Emergency Medical Technicians/Emergency Medical Responders required by Appendix F within the contract.

We appreciate the cooperation shown by the staff of the Department of Safety and Emergency Services during the course of this review.

MD/EP