

Pinellas Assembly - Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes - May 19, 2003, 2 p.m., Largo Training Center

Present: Joseph Calio, Michael Godich, Sally Israel, Kathleen Litton
Staff: Jim Callahan, Gay Lancaster
Other: Jim Angle, Cindy Goodson, Dan Graves, Chuck Kearns, Bill Naylor, Carol Williams

Task force was convened as a result of the Pinellas Assembly conducted May 16-18, 2002. The task force was formulated to discuss fire and EMS issues within Pinellas County with a goal to make a recommendation for potential improvements and/or cost savings. The Pinellas Assembly Policy Statement charged the Fire/EMS task force to:

A study should be conducted of fire services countywide to assess levels of service, costs, the distribution of costs and services, and related factors. The task force should evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable assignment of costs from consolidating districts, having cities serve parts of the unincorporated area, and/or combining the city and county units into a single countywide fire protection system with uniform salary and benefit scales. If full consolidation is recommended, the task force should propose an approach and time-line for phasing it in. The task force should study EMS and evaluate whether costs might be lowered and/or performance improved by combining EMS with partially or fully consolidated fire protection services.

All task force meetings are open to the public. BCC chair Seel's office is attempting to solicit additional members for the fire/EMS task force. City staff representative Jim Callahan's alternate will be Largo Fire Chief Williams, County staff representative Gay Lancaster's alternate will be Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration Director Chuck Kearns. The goal of the staff representatives is provide whatever information and reference material necessary to assist the citizens in going through the evaluation process. This includes statistics, staff analysis, and provision of financial and/or other topic specialists.

A powerpoint presentation was given by Fire Chief Callahan as an overview of the current fire/EMS system in Pinellas County. Information provided included:

- Portfolio of services provided - fire, EMS, community education, fire code compliance, fire investigation, emergency management and other ancillary services.
- EMS system history.
- EMS system design - Public Utility Model - public/private partnership - high performance, all-ALS system.
- EMS system resources - fire department first-responders, private ambulance contractor, air ambulance, countywide medical control, medical education, emergency communications.
- EMS system funding - advalorem taxation (0.66 mills) and ambulance transport user fees.
- Fire Protection history and overview - automatic aid, contractual relationships, funding, specialty teams.
- Firefighting tasks/personnel resources and impact to response time coverage.

There was discussion on the feasibility/viability of equalizing the unincorporated fire district millage rate. Analysis by Pinellas County staff, based on FY 2003 data, indicated a uniform millage rate for unincorporated areas would be 2.688 mills. This analysis excluded the four independent special fire districts created by state legislature. It was noted that all fire jurisdictions utilize property valuation to establish a millage tax with the exception of Pinellas Suncoast Independent Fire District which utilizes a flat fee per residence and a sliding scale for non-residential properties.

The task force discussed issues and costs of regionalization or consolidation related to various fixed assets, political jurisdictions, wages/benefits/pension issues, labor representation, etc. In addition, consolidation would bring all fire related costs into the county's 10 mil cap. Questioned the comparability of costs between the fire service and police services. Indicated that law enforcement is being discussed by another task force, but also touched on the fact that the Sheriff is conducting a study of cost allocations between the countywide tax and the municipal services taxing unit (MSTU).

Generally it was agreed the Fire/EMS system in Pinellas County operates at a high level, but that improvements could be made in services and financing. Discussed the distribution and location of fire station facilities and types of response vehicles. Indicated 72 percent of total responses were medical related, while EMS first-responder revenues were originally based on the marginal cost to add medical upgrades (personnel and equipment) to existing firefighter resources.

Questioned how Pinellas County compares to other similar jurisdictions. Very difficult to find comparable jurisdictions because of the make-up of the system (public utility model) and establish the validity of the data (apples to oranges).

The task force requested additional information:

- Demographics by station or district
 - Call volume by station
 - Population served
 - Staffing
 - Equipment (condition and age)
 - Who utilizes Penny for Pinellas Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) for purchase of apparatus.
 - List of millage caps and current millages by fire district
 - Determine necessary steps if regionalization or consolidation were recommended, i.e., legislative action, countywide or regional referendum vote, charter amendment.
 - Benchmark data?

Next meetings: 6/2/03, 2 p.m., 9-1-1 Communications, 315 Court Street
 6/16/03, 2 p.m., Largo Training Center, 201 Highland

Other information:

- Fire protection services - provided by municipalities and independent special fire districts. Independent fire districts are created through state legislation for this specified purpose (Lealman, East Lake, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Suncoast). Note: St. Petersburg/Clearwater Airport Crash Rescue provided through Pinellas County.
- Fire Protection Agreement - agreements executed between Pinellas County Fire Authority (BCC) and 10 municipalities to provide fire protection to unincorporated county areas. Specifies minimum staffing levels and response time standards. Funding is based upon the relationship of real property values within the unincorporated and incorporated areas of the district - i.e., if 17 percent of the total property valuation is in the unincorporated area, those areas will be assessed a fire district tax to generate 17 percent of the total fire budget. These percentages may change annually due to annexation, reassessment of property values or through new properties being added to the tax roles. Unincorporated fire district millages ranged from 1.299 to 3.608 mills in FY 2003. Records indicate FY 2003 unincorporated county fire funding to municipalities totaled approximately \$14 million.
- Automatic Aid - the perpetual countywide automatic aid agreement was executed by all municipalities, fire districts and Pinellas County for the response of the closest or most appropriate unit to an emergency without regard to jurisdiction.
- EMS 1st Responder Agreement - agreements executed between Pinellas County EMS Authority (BCC) and 12 municipalities and 4 independent fire districts to provide paramedic-level first responder units. Fixed price contract with annual adjustment based on MCI. Specifies minimum staffing levels and response time standards. Records indicate FY 2003 EMS funding to fire department first responders totaled approximately \$19.5 million.
- EMS Ambulance Agreement - agreement executed between Pinellas County EMS Authority (BCC) and American Medical Response (AMR) to provide emergency and non-emergency interfacility transport services. Specifies minimum staffing levels and response time standards. Records indicate 2001 collections for ambulance transport user fees totaled just under \$25.8 million while the cost of the ambulance contract (including the provision of countywide medical supplies) totaled approximately \$18.5 million. AMR operates under the county's trade name of "SUNSTAR."
- Public Utility Model EMS - public/private partnership utilizing fire department ALS-level first-responders and private transport contractor. High performance EMS system utilizing geobased first-response coverage with transport ambulances utilizing peak-load staffing and system status management, i.e., deploying differing quantities of ambulances strategically placed throughout the county based upon historical analysis of call data and transport demand. Provides first-response within 7:30 minutes and transport on scene within 10 minutes 90 percent of the time. Pinellas County provides for countywide medical direction and quality assurance, continuing medical education, and transport billing and collection services.

Millage information:

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Est.</u>	<u>Millage Cap</u>	<u>FY03 Millage</u>
Belleair Bluffs	1974	5.0	2.205
Clearwater	1974	5.0	3.398
Dunedin	1974	5.0	2.482
Gandy (SP)	1974	5.0	2.394
Largo	1974	5.0	3.182
Pinellas Park	1974	5.0	3.074
Safety Harbor	1974	5.0	3.089
Tarpon Springs	1974	5.0	1.549
Seminole	1976	10.0	2.335
High Point (LA/PP)	1978	10.0	3.608
Tierra Verde	1988	1.50	1.299
South Pasadena	1992	5.0	3.105

Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – July 28, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center

Present: Joe Calio, Sally Foote, Ed Hooper, Sally Israel (late), Jerry Knight, Kathleen Litton, Tim Schuler

Staff: Jim Callahan, Gay Lancaster

Others: Fire Chiefs Jim Angle, Brian Brooks, Dan Graves, Rowland Herald, Jay Stout, Carroll Williams, Steve McCarthy (Commander hazmat team), Pete Huffman (Commander tech rescue team), Kevin Bronson, Cindy Goodson(LA), Chuck Kearns, Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Craig Hare, Janice Metzger, Chris Staubus, Gary Vickers (PC), Bob Siler and Jam Lanier (American Medical Response – county's ambulance contractor), Tim Baker, Dave Daiker, Rick Koda, Winthrop Newton (PC Council of Firefighters), Michael Moore (Florida Professional Firefighters) John Frank (LE Board of Fire Commissioners), Rebecca Hassiman (LSFCD)

The committee adopted the minutes of the 7/28 meeting with one amendment (notation that Pinellas County will be providing supplemental rebuttal information at a later date).

Information distributed: copy of invitation sent to elected and appointed officials to the 8/11 meeting, property valuations for 2002 and tentative 2003, Pinellas Suncoast assessment rates, Memorandum from Administrator Spratt to BCC outlining status of the PC assembly task forces and two maps depicting the fire and EMS districts.

Full agenda today – includes guest speakers from the hazardous materials team and technical rescue team commanders, American Medical Response and Pinellas County Council of Firefighters.

Steve McCarthy, Commander, Hazardous Incidents Team.

Today, approximately 110 firefighters provide this specialty service to Pinellas County. This team is possible through a cooperative relationship between five departments (Largo, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Park, Seminole, St. Petersburg) and Pinellas County Emergency Management. In addition, other agencies participating are the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and Pinellas County Fire/EMS (county medical director and EMS/Fire Administration). The informal arrangement is unique, in that the group works very well together as a team, even though they are from several different agencies.

Since the events of September 11th, the hazardous incidents team has been very busy, particularly in the areas of homeland security and WMD preparedness. WMD expertise has been enhanced through the assistance of County EMS and the medical director through the provision of additional entry suits and specialized medical drugs.

The five fire departments provide personnel resources while Pinellas County Emergency Management provides for the purchase of specialty equipment, repairs and organized training.

The Pinellas County Hazardous Materials Team (PCHMT) is comprised of 108 personnel and are distributed as follows:

Largo	18 plus 1 staff
Palm Harbor	18 plus 1 staff
Pinellas Park	18 plus 2 staff
Seminole	18 plus 1 staff
St. Petersburg	30 plus 1 staff
PCSO	1 part-time deputy with an intention to add one more

History of the PCHMT

St. Petersburg formed their hazardous materials team in 1983. In 1984, the Largo, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Park and Seminole departments formulated a cooperative response team. Clearwater was initially a participant, but opted out of the program. In 1988, St. Petersburg joined the countywide team.

A formal agreement with Pinellas County has been in place since 1984. With the exception of St. Petersburg apparatus, all PCHMT vehicles are provided and maintained by the county. In addition, the county provides for miscellaneous equipment, supplies, entry suits, annual hazmat medical physicals and training. The FY 2004 county budget for the hazmat team is \$117,650. Very sophisticated and expensive monitoring equipment has been purchased to enhance the technological capabilities of the PCHMT.

The fire departments house the vehicles and provide support staff and firefighters to manage the team. Hazardous materials mitigation is very involved. The federal government requires 24 hours of instruction annually for each team member. In addition significant inhouse training is also provided. The team operates at a high level and provides significant technical expertise. The PCHMT has formal team-wide training bi-monthly that equates to 48 hours per team member each year. Last year, personnel training totaled 5,280 hours. At an estimated hourly rate of \$15.88, this equates to approximately \$84,000 invested in labor hours just to accomplish the bi-monthly training. This estimate would not include any additional back-fill (overtime) of personnel that may be necessary to ensure coverage of firefighting levels while providing training and loss of personnel resources.

Over time, there have been increases in responsibility and scope of the PCHMT. In the State of Florida, hazmat is designated as the lead agency. The PCHMT is the designated lead agency in Pinellas County for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), decontamination and research. These services are provided in addition to the first responders.

Since September 11th, the PCHMT has responded to numerous suspicious powder incidents. Discussions are being held with the postal service as they install monitoring devices for screening mail. In the event of an exposure at this location, it could result in the mass decontamination of 60-250 people.

There has been a significant increase in responses since September 11th. Prior to this incident, the PCHMT had approximately 250 alarms annually. There were 697 alarms in 2001, 450 in 2002 and 232 in 2003 YTD. The actual use of the PCHMT has been higher. Often times, first responders call a hazmat staff person for consultation without actually initiating an emergency response of a hazmat vehicle.

Currently, the county and the five fire departments bear 100 percent of the costs related to the provision of this team. The PCHMT acknowledges the financial impact on the five communities that support the team and requests consideration of alternative funding methods to spread the costs countywide.

A committee member questioned whether the PCHMT still provides mitigation, with private contractors performing the actual cleanup of spills. Example given, the recent truck rollover on Gulf-to-Bay. This is the current process. The PCHMT is obtaining materials to be able to start the tanker off-load process, and would then transfer to the private contractor. This could reduce the amount of time it takes to clear the an scene.

Another question was whether the hospitals had a plan for mass decontamination and what is their level of participation in the process? It was indicated this is being coordinated through the county and St. Petersburg through the metropolitan municipal recovery system (MMRS). Because of high hospital turnover, the emergency departments can be a weak point in the system. It was indicated hospitals are private entities and can't necessarily be made to participate, but there has been movement in a positive direction.

Another question was, if it's a countywide service, can the five departments provide sufficient personnel to meet the needs? It was stated the number of certified personnel is sufficient, but additional funds to offset the personnel costs would be beneficial.

It was questioned whether cost recovery assessments could be a method to offset costs. Currently, cost recovery only provides for reimbursement for materials, not personnel costs. The true cost of the PCHMT is training and preparedness. It would be difficult to set the cost recovery assessment high enough to recoup these costs.

It was questioned whether it would be possible to impose a countywide tax for the PCHMT similar to EMS. At this time, it hasn't been considered. In addition, a countywide tax would still result in some users of the service (governmental, etc.) not contributing to the costs.

Pete Huffman, Commander, Technical Rescue Team

The Pinellas County Technical Rescue Team (PCTRT) was created in 1992. A steering committee was formed to direct joint training and to ensure equipment compatibility. The team began with the provision of rope skills/rappelling and trench rescue. In 1994, support was provided by Pinellas County, with a focus to mirror the method already established by the Pinellas County Hazardous Materials Team. Five departments participate in the PCTRT - Clearwater, Largo, Pinellas Park, Seminole and St. Petersburg. Approximately 90 personnel are assigned to the team. Various vehicles are maintained at the five departments and provide specialized services:

CL	T48, S49, TE48 (rope, building/trench, confined space, extrication)
LA	TE40, rope, confined space, trench
PP	TE34, rope, confined space, trench, training trailer
SE	TE30, rope, confined space, mass casualty (upcoming)
SP	T4, E4, R4, TE4, rope, building/trench, confined space, USAR

Confinedspace rescue is a very important aspect and was a major driver in uniting the team. If the fire departments did not provide this specialized service, all employers that require personnel to enter confined spaces (manholes, vaults, drums, tanks, etc.) would be required to provide a plan and an on-site team.

The team provides high angle rescue, trench and excavation rescue, building collapse and search and rescue. When performing these functions, scene safety is a major consideration. The team also serves as a support function to the PCHMT, and the dive and surface rescue teams.

Risk factors include construction, maintenance/repair, storm related, building/structure fatigue, vehicle vs building, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The team performs a local risk assessment, develops a target hazard pre-plan, performs site visits and monitors progress. The PCTRT is all about preparation. When rope rappelling, personnel are very safety conscious. It's very important to maintain competency levels of personnel in the various disciplines.

Each of the five department's budgets provide funds to support the personnel, equipment and training. The county provides funding for specialty equipment, vehicles and training through St. Petersburg College. Formal training is provided bi-monthly to PCTRT members.

One committee member noted that the Sunshine Skyway Bridge is actually in Hillsborough County, but utilizes the services of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County. It was stated that because of proximity and location, the resources of the county are routinely drawn upon.

The PCTRT averages approximately 20-25 alarms annually. It was stated actual alarms are much higher but are not tracked because they are not routinely upgraded to "Code 11 – Technical Rescue" in the dispatch system.

Similarly to the PCHMT, the technical rescue team would request consideration of distributing the costs related to the team countywide.

Bob Siler, American Medical Response (AMR)

AMR is the contract agency for ambulance transport for both emergency and non-emergency transportation in Pinellas County. Bob Siler is the Vice President for the local region of AMR that includes Pinellas, Hillsborough and Pasco counties.

AMR has a leadership team in place to provide management in the areas of operations, communications, human resources, safety and loss control. When the team began working on the proposal for the contract renewal, AMR focused on its mission statement which is to be a national leader in quality pre-hospital care through the use of advanced techniques and care of patients. Maintaining excellence with an emphasis on quality of life, AMR maintains its competitive edge through training and techniques, quality patient care, response times and value of service.

The leadership team works together to provide quality resources to the system. Customer and market focus is an integral part of the system. AMR has been a participant in the Pinellas County EMS system for 16 years. AMR routinely applies their knowledge of the client to improve customer satisfaction. How? Through demand and utilization management. Ambulances are scheduled to meet response time criteria. AMR is aware that the EMS Authority, the Office of the Medical Director and hospitals want to reduce the number of emergency room visits for non-emergency conditions. AMR helps by gathering data to facilitate transport at the right time to the right hospital. Through this effort, the EMS Authority and hospitals can better control costs and increase revenues.

AMR learns from its field personnel. There are many AMR employees that interact with customers. Everyone AMR comes in contact with are customers, including citizens, firefighters, law enforcement, hospitals, etc. It's critical to gather information in order to evaluate the satisfaction level of AMR's customers.

Fact-based information is the life-blood of the AMR operation. Data compilation and analysis is critical. AMR has established key performance indicators (KPIs) as a measurement of meeting objectives. Information is constantly evaluated, benchmarks are established and plans are implemented. This data is shared with Pinellas County. AMR utilizes world class benchmarking in technology, supply, equipment and service delivery.

The focus is on prevention. Prevention reduces deficiencies. There are several key control points where an agency can be vulnerable to failure. By monitoring these key points, it is possible to flag and correct deficiencies earlier in the process. In addition, evaluating this data can illustrate trends in service.

AMR utilizes cross-functional teams to guide progress of the organization. AMR is designed to deliver data in a reasonable time frame, including response time compliance.

Jim Lanier, Communications Center Manager, AMR

Mr. Lanier has been with AMR for approximately 15 years.

When a person calls 9-1-1, the county dispatch center will verify the address and phone number and ship the caller to the first responder and Sunstar dispatchers. Dispatch of the ambulance and the first responder is simultaneous. On the ambulance side, the AMR dispatcher will determine the closest ambulance to the call location. How does the dispatcher determine which unit to send? System Status Management (SSM). Ambulances typically are not assigned to fire stations or other fixed facilities, but are assigned to what are called post locations. These post locations vary on a daily and hourly basis and are determined through the use of the SSM plan.

SSM is a resource management system based upon evaluation of historical data, i.e., calls for service by time of day, day of week. Through evaluation of this historical data, resources are assigned and moved around the county in anticipation of where calls historically occur. There are no geographic boundaries for ambulance assignments.

Some geographic areas are busier than others, but all areas of the county receive the same level of service and response time compliance. The assignment of ambulances is very fluid, balancing the needs for emergency and non-emergency transport services at any given time. The process moves all the time and ambulances can be switched out for closer resources as they become available to meet current demands.

The dispatchers utilize priority dispatch. AMR Sunstar Emergency Communications utilizes certified paramedics to receive the 9-1-1 call. These emergency medical dispatchers will ask the caller a series of questions to assess the medical situation. This information will be entered into the computer aided dispatch system computer (CAD) and relayed to field ambulances and first responder units. If the situation is determined to be non-life threatening, both the first responder and the ambulance will continue to the emergency, but the ambulance will be downgraded (respond non-emergency). Sending both units to the emergency call ensures no loss of coverage to the public. AMR receives approximately 35,000 calls from 7-digit phone numbers in addition to 9-1-1 system calls.

What does all this mean? AMR's expertise produces a high-quality ambulance system countywide. AMR provides emergency response within 10 minutes, 90 percent of the time each month. This response time compliance must also be met in each district, i.e., you can't exceed the response time compliance in one area to the detriment of another area of the county.

By contract, all expertise and units of production must remain in Pinellas County.

Vehicles and resources cannot be deployed to other markets (Hillsborough, Pasco). AMR uses closet unit response and has fluid deployment without recognition of boundaries within the county. AMR does respond and transport to other counties, including Hillsborough, Miami and Gainesville daily. Typically, these out-of-county transports from one medical facility to another are for specialty care.

AMR Statistics

Annually, on average, there are 155,000 AMR responses. This includes emergency, non-emergency, and critical-care transport. Of those, AMR transports approximately 106,000. Response time compliance is 99.2% for scheduled non-emergency, 96.2% for non-emergency, and 90.9% for emergency alarms.

In addition to medical response, AMR also provides other services:

Provides the tactical EMS program (SWAT) with the Sheriff's Office.

Provides standby at events, approximately 1,600 contact hours annually.

Public education, 250 events annually with approximately 60,000 contacts.

Logged 2.3 million miles of driving for the vehicle fleet. Provide 62 vehicles (both ambulance and support).

Workforce of 414 full and part-time personnel, including administrative staff.

It was questioned, who pays for the transport out-of-county, i.e., a transport to Gainesville? Typically the patient, medical insurance, Medicare/Medicaid, or the initiating facility will pay for the transport. The majority of the out-of-county transports are covered by medical insurance. These transfers are supported by the transport user fee and are not supported by ad valorem dollars.

Pinellas County does all the ambulance billing with a staff of 31. The transport billing rate is set at an amount to cover transport costs and is also sufficient to pay for the medical director's contract, continuing medical education contract, disposable medical supplies and County EMS administration. A percentage of user fees are uncollected. It was estimated approximately \$1.6 million was uncollected compared to approximately \$40 million billed annually. The transport user fees are self-supporting. These user fees are sufficient to pay for the transport contractor and other administrative costs as well.

AMR is paid a base amount for 8,000 transports monthly. If actual transports exceed the base number, AMR is compensated a wholesale rate of \$140 per transport in excess of the 8,000 a month.

All ambulances are staffed with at least an EMT and a paramedic, sometimes with two paramedics. Pinellas County is an all-ALS system – both first responders and ambulances. There is a minimum of one paramedic on all ALS units in accordance with state standards. The only departments in the county that are EMT-level versus paramedic-level are Airport Crash Rescue and Belleair Bluffs. The difference between EMT and paramedic is the number of educational hours required to be certified and the level of medical skills they are allowed to perform.

The ambulances are owned by AMR, but through the contract, provide a lease-back option to the county. If AMR were to default or withdraw from the contract, Pinellas County would retain the vehicles. The only equipment used daily by AMR that is not owned by AMR is the radio system. AMR's communication center is located at the Sunstar Building/Pinellas County EMS/Fire Administration on Ulmerton Road.

It was noted that AMR employees recently organized into the International Association of EMTs and Paramedics.

A handout was distributed, listing the various awards and recognitions Sunstar has received over the years, including receiving ambulance service (CAAS) accreditation., Listing of awards is accessible on the website <http://www.sunstar-ems.com/about/awards.asp>.

From a handout provided describing American Medical Response: Every day, AMR develops caring solutions to meet community needs. We are professionals, meeting the highest performance standards. We are a partner who offers the assurance of respect, one person at a time. The dignity of compassion. The security of responsiveness and reliability. The confidence of competence. And integrity you can believe in.

Dave Diaker, President, Pinellas County Council of Firefighters

The Pinellas County Council of Firefighters (council) is affiliated with the Florida Professional Firefighters and the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF). The IAFF is well known for its charitable efforts in collecting funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA). Over the years, millions have been raised by firefighters through boot drives to support Jerry's kids.

There are 11 labor locals in Pinellas County representing 20 fire departments. The council was formed in 1988, representing 1050 members - full-time firefighters and EMS personnel. Most of the 11 labor groups have 100 percent participation of their eligible employees. The only non-union department within the county is Airport Crash Rescue.

The IAFF is politically active at the local, state and federal level for the promotion of firefighter benefits and safety.

The council supports several of the issues presented by the fire chiefs at the July 14 committee meeting. These include pursuing the feasibility of a countywide insurance consortium and the addition of regional training centers to reduce out-of-service and

travel time.

The council would be in favor of regional consolidation provided there was no decrease in firefighter pay or benefits. The council would work in cooperation with other agencies on an implementation plan. It was noted the council is currently regionalized to a certain extent, i.e., some of the larger labor unions already represent several other departments in addition to their own. It was asked, how is it decided who represents who, and why are some departments represented by a different local? It was indicated some smaller locals may not have sufficient resources of their own, or may prefer to affiliate with a larger local.

The council supports staffing of apparatus in accordance with NFPA 1710 and the state's 2-in/2-out rule that requires four firefighters to be assembled prior to an interior attack. Appropriate staffing levels is a safety consideration. It was indicated if the committee were interested, the council could provide another indepth session on NFPA 1710 and staffing and a video is available for review.

Rick Koda, Pinellas County Council of Firefighters

Rick Koda is a Lieutenant/Paramedic with 16 years with Seminole Fire Department, and worked for the ambulance company prior to that. He indicated the firefighters agree with the fire chiefs on fire-based transport. Currently, fire and EMS services are functionally consolidated in the county because of consolidated dispatch and automatic aid. He indicated he was recently at a Lealman fire that had apparatus from as far north as Clearwater.

He indicated the labor group supported the fire chiefs' suggestions related to ISO, water supply/hydrants, standardized training and facilities, and fire department emergency transport. He also indicated the firefighters support the county's centralized dispatch, cooperative purchasing and the creation of an insurance consortium.

The Pinellas County Council of Firefighters met with County Administrator Spratt on March 21 to discuss concerns with the ambulance company's contract compliance. At that time, AMR had been out of response-time compliance for emergency transports. AMR's staffing difficulties had increased the incidence of fire department's providing emergency transport because of the unavailability of AMR ambulances.

Prior to today's fire/EMS taskforce meeting, the dispatch center was contacted as to the number of ambulances currently running in the system. The information provided was that there were 29 ambulances in the county --14 on emergency calls, 6 on non-emergency calls and 9 available for assignment. It was indicated by the dispatch center that this was a good level for 2:15 p.m. It is the council's opinion that this is the fundamental flaw of system status management. The ambulance system is attempting to do two different things, both emergency and non-emergency calls. It had previously been noted that 60 percent of the transport demand is emergency-related with 40 percent of the demand related to non-emergency.

Non-emergency calls are primarily interfacility transports, i.e., transfers from nursing homes to hospitals, and transfers from one medical facility to another. These non-emergency calls take away from the availability to respond to emergency calls of a more urgent nature, i.e., cardiac arrest. The ambulance contractor utilizes system status management as a tool to run the minimum possible number of ambulances at any given time based upon historical review. At times assigned resources are insufficient to cover the demand. Examples were given where a non-emergency patient was delayed because the assigned ambulance was diverted to an emergency call and where there are delays in the arrival of an ambulance to an emergency call because transport units had to travel great distances.

He indicated there are other concerns with the current system. He indicated ambulance personnel worked very hard, usually working 12-hour shifts without facilities. Ambulance personnel are constantly running, as reflected in the two million miles traveled. Ambulance units are strategically placed, but they are constantly moved to meet anticipated future work load. This results in very difficult working conditions for AMR personnel. These poor working conditions result in a high turn-over rate of ambulance personnel and may result in inexperienced workers providing medical care to the system. This turn-over is a concern of the council because current protocols require the first responder to transfer patient care to the ambulance paramedic when a transport is necessary.

He indicated turn over is not necessarily unique to the ambulance company, there is fire department turn-over as well. Certified paramedics are a premium. Typically, ambulance personnel will leave AMR for employment with the fire service, creating more turn-over.

The council indicated another flaw of the current system is that AMR is a for-profit system. AMR is currently owned by Laidlaw (based in Canada), and was previously owned by a company based in Japan. The council contends that funds from the system should be retained in the county rather than transferred outside the United States.

The council proposes a different system that would ensure emergency and non-emergency transport resources would not interfere with each other. A contractor could be retained for the provision of non-emergency transports. This workload can be easily planned based upon historical data because the majority of interfacility transports are during daylight hours, Monday-Friday. Emergency calls, on the other hand, are not as easily planned. The council's contention is the best system for emergency transport would be fire-based. Fire stations are strategically located countywide for the provision of rapid response times.

The council recommends the Pinellas County Fire/EMS Authority, in conjunction with the fire departments, conduct a feasibility of a fire-based transport system model. The council proposes a 4-tier system:

Tier 1 - Fire department ambulances strategically placed by the Fire/EMS Authority based upon historic call volume and geographic location.

Tier 2 - Fire department rescue trucks currently in place in regional response areas (currently 27 rescues countywide).

Tier 3 - Fire department transport units that could be staffed by on-duty firefighters when needed (currently 9 non-staffed transports countywide).

Tier 4 - a) Private contractor agreement.
- b) Call back of firefighter personnel, examples include tropical storm, terrorism or other disasters.

This proposal would be a benefit to the transport system and would also provide an increase in firefighting capabilities through the utilization of cross-trained EMTs and paramedics as firefighters. This could increase the number of certified firefighters available to respond to emergencies, could increase the number of firefighters provided on the emergency scene, and improve staffing requirements recommended by the Insurance Services Office (ISO).

It was stated that the system would not necessarily require all EMTs and paramedics to immediately become firefighters, that it could be phased in over time. The council gave a brief example of the transition in Hillsborough County where many EMTs and paramedics became cross-trained as firefighters, but that some of the more tenured employees did not seek that option.

It was asked, how many of the 1,050 firefighters are certified as EMT or paramedic? The response was nearly all of them. The few that are not EMT or paramedic certified would most likely be veteran employees that were hired prior to EMT/paramedic becoming an integral part of the job. Of the 1,050 firefighters, approximately 600 are certified as paramedics.

The county stated the qualities of individuals on both sides of the system are comparable and they are comfortable that individuals are well-trained at an appropriate level for their positions. It was agreed there is a high turn-over, but this is consistent nationwide for both the ambulance service and the fire service.

The county indicated the ambulance contractor provides approximately 106,000 transports annually, with the fire departments performing approximately 120 - 150 transports on average. When AMR was having issues with their response time compliance a few months ago, it did result in an increase of the incidence of fire department transports, however even with the increase, it was not statistically significant. The county has been working with AMR to ensure contract compliance, and noted the emergency response compliance missed the 90th percentile by only a few calls.

It was stated the focus of the EMS system is both on life-saving and financial considerations. That a split system for transport may not be competitive in terms of cost.

The current process provides a high level of quality through the terms and conditions of the ambulance contract. Also, transports are provided at a discount rate and all excess user fees collected are used to offset the cost of other components of the EMS system. It was stated that this is not to diminish the fire service in this county, but it is an economic position with respect to transport. A committee member suggested a study could be conducted to evaluate the feasibility of a split transport system.

It was questioned about the 4-tier proposal, how would the departments deal with increased out-of-service time to complete a transport (involved time increased from approximately 20 minutes to 1 hour)? The council's response is that it would be similar to what is in place now except the ambulances would be staffed by fire department FF/EMTs and FF/paramedics focusing only on emergency calls. These ambulances would be geo-based, based on historical data. These staffed ambulances would be in addition to the current rescues that are in service in the system. The example given was in St. Petersburg, with 12 stations, there could be potentially an additional number of fire-based ambulances in service in addition to the available rescue vehicles.

The council stated the 4-tier proposal would improve personnel working conditions and would provide continuity of care for the patient.

It was asked whether patients transported by fire department resources receive a bill (user fee)? Yes, all persons that receive a ride in an ambulance receive a bill from Pinellas County. In addition, both agencies - fire and AMR, are required to submit a billable run report within two days of transport. Failure to do so results in a penalty to the transport provider. It was noted that the billing process has improved tremendously over the last few years. The county stated that a few years ago, they were audited by Medicare for transport billing. The county was deducted for \$1.6 million in Medicare reimbursements as not meeting medical necessity. After a tedious process and a four-year appeal, the county was able to prove this was an inappropriate audit and received the funds back from Medicare.

The new contract with the ambulance contractor provides tighter requirements for completeness and accuracy of transport reports (including valid zip codes) to facilitate the billing process. In addition, there have been staffing changes in the billing office that places the emphasis on good business practices from a CPA and audit perspective. It was questioned, how is it possible that with increasing costs, the countywide EMS millage has been reduced or maintained at the same level for so many years? This is primarily due to increased property values and by doing a better job in the collection of user fees.

It is a fair assumption that Pinellas County has a more expensive system. It provides for excellent response times of paramedic-staffed units to provide for increased survival rates. The system is redundant in a way, in that it provides two paramedics and two EMTs at the door of nearly every 9-1-1 EMS call through the dual response of both a first responder and an ambulance. The County stated through the use of priority dispatch, decisions could be made to eliminate the double response of fire and AMR units. Currently, the ambulance can be canceled or downgraded. It could be possible for fire to go to priority dispatch as well for EMS calls.

General Discussion

There was discussion about AMR being unionized. Florida is a right-to-work state, however public sector employees are prohibited from striking. Do AMR employees have the right to strike? Commitment from AMR has been received that this will not occur, and in any event, Pinellas County has an emergency takeover plan in place.

There was discussion of the upcoming August 11 meeting in which the county administrator, city mayors, city managers, chairs/fire districts are invited to express their view points. It was noted there may be a conflict in the county administrator's schedule which may necessitate an additional meeting for the county's counterpoint of the information that's been presented to date. It was also discussed whether formal questions should be prepared for the upcoming meeting, since it is unlikely a spokesperson will be designated from the diverse group.

The chair noted the time table for the taskforce is to have a report by October, so additional meetings may need to be scheduled to meet the deadline. It was noted it may be desirable to also have a presentation of the legal aspects of fire/EMS service modifications and the charter review process. It was suggested it may be more beneficial to develop specific questions so that legal can do the necessary research prior to providing a presentation.

A committee member distributed a rough outline that could potentially serve as the framework for the development of the committee's report. It was stated more detailed financial information may be necessary once the committee begins working on specific recommendations. It was also stated this committee is about as far along in the process as the other task forces in that all are still in the fact-gathering stages.

Next meeting, August 11, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Largo Training Center

Invited to express view points: County administrator, city mayors, city managers, chairs of independent special fire districts.

Meeting adjourned 5:55 p.m.

Note: Clarification information will be provided by Pinellas County at a later date.

Pinellas Assembly - Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting Minutes - August 11, 2003, 3:00 p.m.
Largo Training Center

Present: Ed Hooper, Chairman; Joe Calio; Sally Foote; Sally Israel; Jerry Knight; Kathleen Litton; Tim Schuler
Staff: Chuck Kearns (Gay Lancaster absent), Carol Williams (Chief Callahan absent)
Others: Mayors: John Doglione, Tish Elston (Deputy Mayor), Robert Jackson, Bill Mischler; Fire District Board Members: John G. Frank, Rebecca Harriman, Tom Hafner, Bob McEwen, Robert Shatanoff; City Council Members: Hoyt Hamilton, Neil Brickfield; City Managers: Michael Gustafson, Bruce Haddock, Bill Horne, John Lawrence, Wayne Logan, Ellen Posivach, Steven Stanton; Pinellas County Staff: Steve Spratt, Dwaine Booth, Craig Hare, Janice Metzger, Linda Shultz; American Medical Response: Bob Garner, Jim Lanier, Steve Murphy, Dan Stumpfhauser, Bob Siler; Fire Chiefs: Jim Angle, Kevin Bowman, Dan Graves, Rowland Herald, Bud Meyer, William Naylor, Jay Stout; PCCFF/FPF: Timothy Baker, Ed Broomes, Dave Daiker, Mike Moore; Others: David Brown (LE), Linda Hallas (PA), Rick Koda (SE), James D. Large (SP), Steven Smith (SP), Allan Sychowski (MB),

Mr. Hooper began the meeting by requesting that those in attendance sign the roster.

The Committee unanimously adopted the minutes of the last meeting.

Mr. Hooper asked that individuals in attendance introduce themselves.

The goals established for the Task Force were read. The Pinellas Assembly Policy Statement charged the Fire/EMS Task Force to:

Conduct a study of fire services countywide to assess levels of service, costs, the distribution of costs and services, and related factors. The task force should evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable assignment of costs from consolidating districts, having cities serve parts of the unincorporated area, and /or combining the city and county units into a single countywide fire protection system with uniform salary and benefit scales. If full consolidation is recommended, the task force should propose an approach and time-line for phasing it in. The task force should study EMS and evaluate whether costs might be lowered and/or performance improved by combining EMS with partially or fully consolidated fire protection services.

Mr. Hooper stated that some of the issues that had to be addressed related to partial or complete consolidation of the fire service, a countywide goal of a 3 or better ISO rating, mutual purchasing agreements, the Belleair/Belleair Bluffs issue, budget concerns, and the appropriateness of County fire protection funding.

Mr. Hooper acknowledged the presence of Stephen M. Spratt, County Administrator, and said that he welcomed Mr. Spratt's input, especially considering Mr. Spratt's knowledge of the Miami-Dade fire system, a semi-consolidated fire protection service.

Mr. Calio asked if city administrators and fire chiefs favored a model that would allow the various fire service entities to perform EMS emergency transports rather than AMR, the current ambulance service provider. The goal would be to provide more dollars to the fire departments to fund the hiring of additional fire fighters. John Daglione, Mayor of the City of Dunedin, mentioned that some fire services seem to favor moving in that direction, but if such a program were to be adopted, it would have to be equitable. Chuck Kearns, Director of Pinellas County EMS and Fire Administration, stated that annually, AMR handles approximately 106,000 transports and the fire departments transport about 120 to 150. Mr. Calio asked the group if there was interest in working toward construction of a model to encompass the

assumption of emergency transport duties from AMR. Mr. Hooper reiterated that some cities would support such a move and others would not. He feels that a clear consensus must be obtained in order to consider such action. Bill Naylor, South Pasadena Fire Chief and President of the Fire Chiefs Association, said that fire chiefs have a unanimous interest in such a proposition. Chuck Kearns asked if the fire chiefs had made a motion and taken a vote to support fire department transport. They had not. Largo Fire Chief, E. Carroll Williams, affirmed that there would be an interest if it can be established that a better system could be attained by such a move. He further stated that an assessment of benefits vs. cost must be conducted. John Daglione stated that if the system can be improved and the costs justified, there would be no downside to looking at the possibilities of such a proposal, but it must not increase costs.

Mr. Hooper mentioned that the issue is complicated because of different funding structures for EMS and fire components. EMS is funded at .66 mills, while fire funding varies between fire departments. Chuck Kearns pointed out some differences, stating that independent funding is currently as high as 5 mills, while Tierra Verde is at 1.5 mills. Mr. Hooper asked why such differences existed, and that he believes the County has an interest in universal fire fees where everyone pays the same rate. Mr. Kearns told the group that he often receives calls from citizens questioning why they pay different amounts. Mr. Hooper mentioned that properties exempt from taxation (valued at approximately 7 billion dollars within Pinellas County) utilize services but do not contribute to offset the costs of service. Inequity within the tax base, and the fire service funding associated with it, was presented several times during the course of the meeting as a major concern of those in attendance.

Mr. Hooper mentioned that discussion of a consolidated fire service usually prompts questions about wages; will they be at the top of the scale or the bottom? Mr. Knight mentioned that several key components of a consolidated system are already in place such as centralized dispatch, coordinated responses, cooperative endeavors among the fire departments, etc.

Mr. Spratt, after being asked several questions about the structure of the fire service within Miami-Dade, stressed that Pinellas County had not taken a position on a consolidated system. He further stated that his experience with Miami-Dade should not suggest that he supports consolidation. He said that fiscal pricing and equity issues must be addressed.

Mr. Hooper asked several questions about what the County funded in connection with special teams (Hazmat, Technical Rescue). Chuck Kearns stated that partial funding by the County of these teams is ongoing and that the County provides vehicles, funds for training, technical equipment, etc.

The discussion again turned to consolidation of fire services. Mr. Knight said that it was his impression that there is major opposition to consolidation. One city spokesperson asked what savings would be realized through consolidation and stated that the city he represents would have serious issues with it. Another mentioned that they were happy with their fire service and wanted to keep it in place as is, but suggested that funding in a more equitable manner could be looked at.

Representatives of South Pasadena stated that they field questions about inequities of the tax structure all of the time and that after Gulfport annexed unincorporated areas, South Pasadena got the calls to handle but not the revenue. Chief Naylor stated that South Pasadena would like to annex, but can't afford the infrastructure costs (street lights, roads, sidewalks, hydrants) to do so. Cooperation between fire departments was also mentioned in that the departments often work together to realize economies, even when there is no formal agreement between them to do so. When the South Pasadena representatives stated that funding of their ALS First Responder unit was too low, Chuck Kearns advised that they ranked within the highest five of the eighteen fire service first responders in terms of per unit funding.

When discussion again centered on fire departments handling all emergency transports, a question was presented relating to how the transport was billed. Chuck Kearns stated that EMS & Fire Administration handles all of the billing, and that user fees fund the ambulance system. He was asked about the collection rate and total billed last year. Janice Metzger, EMS Finance Manager, responded that a recent month's collection rate was 70%, and that approximately 47 million dollars was billed last year.

Mr. Horne, Clearwater City Manager, stated that in order for the fire departments to consider this approach and respond, data must be evaluated. He further added that if the task force feels the approach will benefit the county, it must be considered. Mr. Kearns responded that there is a need to know the feelings of the other entities involved. He mentioned that the last time the ambulance service contract went to bid, three fire departments expressed interest, but only one presented a bid and it was in a partnership with a private company. A spokesman from Dunedin said that all 24 governments may want to look at it, but "don't want to fill in the squares" themselves. Mr. Spratt asked what problems would be solved if this conversion were to take place. He added that the numbers would have to be thoroughly analyzed and that equipment and capacity represent a big number. He cautioned that care and thoroughness are warranted in the evaluation of this data. Mr. Logan (Safety Harbor) agreed with Mr. Spratt, stating that the model and funding are key elements to consider.

Task force member, Sally Foote, asked attendees to identify needs across the county that might be fulfilled by cooperative efforts of the fire departments. She cited examples such as coordinated purchasing, purchase of various types of insurance, sharing of training facilities, equipment uniformity programs and asked if such cooperation existed, should it be formalized. Several attendees commented that some types of insurance may fit into this type of cooperative program (workers' comp, liability, etc.), but doubted whether medical insurance could, due to varying benefit levels. It was felt that smaller fire departments are not afforded the best prices for medical coverage. It was stated that insurance carriers often refuse to insure fire services because of their high-risk status. Higher workers' compensation claims experience within certain fire departments could also impact the effectiveness of group purchasing.

City of Largo representatives did not support pooling of resources citing that they have invested in infrastructure and have made major investments for the benefit of their communities. It was also felt that cooperative efforts are already in place. Chief Naylor commented that fire departments have worked on standardization of equipment and training. He also mentioned that although South Pasadena could not fund special teams, working through St. Petersburg and the County, he knows assistance is available to South Pasadena should the need arise. Chief Naylor stated that funding was broken, not the system.

Mr. Knight offered that a former consolidated purchasing program was ineffective because a uniform policy was not properly established. He indicated that fire departments undermined the effectiveness of the program by individually approaching vendors to secure prices lower than those established within the program. Using this scenario, he speculated that elected officials could have ensured the success of the program by voicing their support of certain policies.

Mr. Knight requested discussion of ISO ratings. He indicated that a number of years ago, fire chiefs had an initiative to request an ISO survey within Pinellas County in order to establish a 3 or better rating. The advantage of a minimum rating of 3 or better would be reduced insurance costs to commercial property owners, and in turn stimulation of economic development and investment. Savings to residential owners would be not occur. Mr. Knight asked if attendees felt these advantages were sufficient to rally support for a countywide ISO survey.

Dwaine Booth, Assistant Director of EMS & Fire Administration, offered some insight into a 1992 study that was conducted by ISO for the County. ISO was asked to conduct a study to determine what the rating would be if all fire departments were pooled together. The result was a rating of 4. Even though the rating was close to a 3, some cities pulled support, thinking the survey was associated with a consolidation issue. In 1992, the cost of the survey was \$17,000. Mr. Booth did not know what the cost of a current survey would be. Mr. Hooper asked if anyone would object to a survey being conducted. Largo Fire Chief Williams stated that his department actually lost points after making some improvements and said that the ISO rating criteria has changed. Largo representatives stated they were opposed to pooling because they did not want to bear the burden of the cost of improvements. Mr. Booth mentioned that certain rating categories are weighted more heavily than others, i.e., communications and record keeping processes. Chief Naylor added that one factor that kept his department at a 4 rating was manning levels. Mr. Booth said that during the 1992 study, it was difficult to determine what the cost of improvements would be, compared to insurance cost savings that a better rating would generate.

Ellen Posivach, Tarpon Springs City Manager, advised that she hears regularly from citizens who are opposed to any property tax increases and who favor fee-based services or reduction in services. She cited stabilization of costs, especially competitive salary issues, as being critical. She wants to see standard salary ranges between municipalities.

Mr. Hooper asked attendees to share an item from their "wish list". Mr. Spratt offered that he would like to see improved integration of services allowing economies to be achieved and the development of a fair tax structure to support fire and EMS services. Other "wish list" suggestions included:

- The acknowledgement of accomplishments of the fire chiefs by elected officials,
- Maximization of cooperative efforts in connection with training, purchasing, insurance cost containment, standardization,
- Increase in EMS funding for ALS first responder units in Oldsmar,
- Examination of bureaucratic downsizing,
- Cooperation and continued support from other cities in connection with manpower, ISO, NFPA standards,
- Establishing what the desired level of service should be, ascertaining the required funding associated with that level, and developing additional sources of funding,
- American Medical Response wished to be considered part of the EMS system, rather than a contract service,
- Safety of fire fighters and creative use of prevention techniques (sprinklers, construction, etc.). Emphasis on investment for fire prevention.

The meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

01/25/03
Handout

**Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – July 28, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center
REVISED**

Present: Joe Calio, Sally Foote, Ed Hooper, Sally Israel (late), Jerry Knight, Kathleen Litton, Tim Schuler

Staff: Jim Callahan, Gay Lancaster

Others: Fire Chiefs Jim Angle, Brian Brooks, Dan Graves, Rowland Herald, Jay Stout, Carroll Williams, Steve McCarthy (Commander hazmat team), Pete Huffman (Commander tech rescue team), Kevin Bronson, Cindy Goodson(LA), Chuck Kearns, Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Craig Hare, Janice Metzger, Chris Staubus, Gary Vickers (PC), Bob Siler and Jam Lanier (American Medical Response – county's ambulance contractor), Tim Baker, Dave Daiker, Rick Koda, Winthrop Newton (PC Council of Firefighters), Michael Moore (Florida Professional Firefighters) John Frank (LE Board of Fire Commissioners), Rebecca Hassiman (LSFCD)

The committee adopted the minutes of the 7/28 meeting with one amendment (notation that Pinellas County will be providing supplemental rebuttal information at a later date).

Information distributed: copy of invitation sent to elected and appointed officials to the 8/11 meeting, property valuations for 2002 and tentative 2003, Pinellas Suncoast assessment rates, Memorandum from Administrator Spratt to BCC outlining status of the PC assembly task forces and two maps depicting the fire and EMS districts.

Full agenda today – includes guest speakers from the hazardous materials team and technical rescue team commanders, American Medical Response and Pinellas County Council of Firefighters.

Steve McCarthy, Commander, Hazardous Incidents Team.

Today, approximately 110 firefighters provide this specialty service to Pinellas County. This team is possible through a cooperative relationship between five departments (Largo, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Park, Seminole, St. Petersburg) and Pinellas County Emergency Management. In addition, other agencies participating are the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office and Pinellas County Fire/EMS (county medical director and EMS/Fire Administration). The informal arrangement is unique, in that the group works very well together as a team, even though they are from several different agencies.

Since the events of September 11th, the hazardous incidents team has been very busy, particularly in the areas of homeland security and WMD preparedness. WMD expertise has been enhanced through the assistance of County EMS and the medical director through the provision of additional entry suits and specialized medical drugs.

The five fire departments provide personnel resources while Pinellas County Emergency Management provides for the purchase of specialty equipment, repairs and organized training.

The Pinellas County Hazardous Materials Team (PCHMT) is comprised of 108 personnel and are distributed as follows:

Largo	18 plus 1 staff
Palm Harbor	18 plus 1 staff
Pinellas Park	18 plus 2 staff
Seminole	18 plus 1 staff
St. Petersburg	30 plus 1 staff
PCSO	1 part-time deputy with an intention to add one more

History of the PCHMT

St. Petersburg formed their hazardous materials team in 1983. In 1984, the Largo, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Park and Seminole departments formulated a cooperative response team. Clearwater was initially a participant, but opted out of the program. In 1988, St. Petersburg joined the countywide team.

A formal agreement with Pinellas County has been in place since 1984. With the exception of St. Petersburg apparatus, all PCHMT vehicles are provided and maintained by the county. In addition, the county provides for miscellaneous equipment, supplies, entry suits, annual hazmat medical physicals and training. The FY 2004 county budget for the hazmat team is \$117,650. Very sophisticated and expensive monitoring equipment has been purchased to enhance the technological capabilities of the PCHMT.

The fire departments house the vehicles and provide support staff and firefighters to manage the team. Hazardous materials mitigation is very involved. The federal government requires 24 hours of instruction annually for each team member. In addition significant inhouse training is also provided. The team operates at a high level and provides significant technical expertise. The PCHMT has formal team-wide training bi-monthly that equates to 48 hours per team member each year. Last year, personnel training totaled 5,280 hours. At an estimated hourly rate of \$15.88, this equates to approximately \$84,000 invested in labor hours just to accomplish the bi-monthly training. This estimate would not include any additional back-fill (overtime) of personnel that may be necessary to ensure coverage of firefighting levels while providing training and loss of personnel resources.

Over time, there have been increases in responsibility and scope of the PCHMT. In the State of Florida, hazmat is designated as the lead agency. The PCHMT is the designated lead agency in Pinellas County for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), decontamination and research. These services are provided in addition to the first responders.

Since September 11th, the PCHMT has responded to numerous suspicious powder incidents. Discussions are being held with the postal service as they install monitoring devices for screening mail. In the event of an exposure at this location, it could result in the mass decontamination of 60-250 people.

There has been a significant increase in responses since September 11th. Prior to this incident, the PCHMT had approximately 250 alarms annually. There were 697 alarms in 2001, 450 in 2002 and 232 in 2003 YTD. The actual use of the PCHMT has been higher. Often times, first responders call a hazmat staff person for consultation without actually initiating an emergency response of a hazmat vehicle.

Currently, the county and the five fire departments bear 100 percent of the costs related to the provision of this team. The PCHMT acknowledges the financial impact on the five communities that support the team and requests consideration of alternative funding methods to spread the costs countywide.

A committee member questioned whether the PCHMT still provides mitigation, with private contractors performing the actual cleanup of spills. Example given, the recent truck rollover on Gulf-to-Bay. This is the current process. The PCHMT is obtaining materials to be able to start the tanker off-load process, and would then transfer to the private contractor. This could reduce the amount of time it takes to clear the scene.

Another question was whether the hospitals had a plan for mass decontamination and what is their level of participation in the process? It was indicated this is being coordinated through the county and St. Petersburg through the metropolitan municipal recovery system (MMRS). Because of high hospital turnover, the emergency departments can be a weak point in the system. It was indicated hospitals are private entities and can't necessarily be made to participate, but there has been movement in a positive direction.

Another question was, if it's a countywide service, can the five departments provide sufficient personnel to meet the needs? It was stated the number of certified personnel is sufficient, but additional funds to offset the personnel costs would be beneficial.

It was questioned whether cost recovery assessments could be a method to offset costs. Currently, cost recovery only provides for reimbursement for materials, not personnel costs. The true cost of the PCHMT is training and preparedness. It would be difficult to set the cost recovery assessment high enough to recoup these costs.

It was questioned whether it would be possible to impose a countywide tax for the PCHMT similar to EMS. At this time, it hasn't been considered. In addition, a countywide tax would still result in some users of the service (governmental, etc.) not contributing to the costs.

Pete Huffman, Commander, Technical Rescue Team

The Pinellas County Technical Rescue Team (PCTRT) was created in 1992. A steering committee was formed to direct joint training and to ensure equipment compatibility. The team began with the provision of rope skills/rappelling and trench rescue. In 1994, support was provided by Pinellas County, with a focus to mirror the method already established by the Pinellas County Hazardous Materials Team. Five departments participate in the PCTRT - Clearwater, Largo, Pinellas Park, Seminole and St. Petersburg. Approximately 90 personnel are assigned to the team. Various vehicles are maintained at the five departments and provide specialized services:

CL	T48, S49, TE48 (rope, building/trench, confined space, extrication)
LA	TE40, rope, confined space, trench
PP	TE34, rope, confined space, trench, training trailer
SE	TE30, rope, confined space, mass casualty (upcoming)
SP	T4, E4, R4, TE4, rope, building/trench, confined space, USAR

Confinedspace rescue is a very important aspect and was a major driver in uniting the team. If the fire departments did not provide this specialized service, all employers that require personnel to enter confined spaces (manholes, vaults, drums, tanks, etc.) would be required to provide a plan and an on-site team.

The team provides high angle rescue, trench and excavation rescue, building collapse and search and rescue. When performing these functions, scene safety is a major consideration. The team also serves as a support function to the PCHMT, and the dive and surface rescue teams.

Risk factors include construction, maintenance/repair, storm related, building/structure fatigue, vehicle vs building, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

The team performs a local risk assessment, develops a target hazard pre-plan, performs site visits and monitors progress. The PCTRT is all about preparation. When rope rappelling, personnel are very safety conscious. It's very important to maintain competency levels of personnel in the various disciplines.

Each of the five department's budgets provide funds to support the personnel, equipment and training. The county provides funding for specialty equipment, vehicles and training through St. Petersburg College. Formal training is provided bi-monthly to PCTRT members.

One committee member noted that the Sunshine Skyway Bridge is actually in Hillsborough County, but utilizes the services of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County. It was stated that because of proximity and location, the resources of the county are routinely drawn upon.

The PCTRT averages approximately 20-25 alarms annually. It was stated actual alarms are much higher but are not tracked because they are not routinely upgraded to "Code 11 – Technical Rescue" in the dispatch system.

Similarly to the PCHMT, the technical rescue team would request consideration of distributing the costs related to the team countywide.

Bob Siler, American Medical Response (AMR)

AMR is the contract agency for ambulance transport for both emergency and non-emergency transportation in Pinellas County. Bob Siler is the Vice President ~~Chief Operating Officer~~ for the local region of AMR that includes Pinellas, Hillsborough and Pasco counties.

AMR has a leadership team in place to provide management in the areas of operations, communications, human resources, safety and loss control. When the team began working on the proposal for the contract renewal, AMR focused on its mission statement which is to be a national leader in quality pre-hospital care through the use of advanced techniques and care of patients. Maintaining excellence with an emphasis on quality of life, AMR maintains its competitive edge through training and techniques, quality patient care, response times and value of service.

The leadership team works together to provide quality resources to the system. Customer and market focus is an integral part of the system. AMR has been a participant in the Pinellas County EMS system for 16 years. AMR routinely applies their knowledge of the client to improve customer satisfaction. How? Through demand and utilization management. Ambulances are scheduled to meet response time criteria. AMR is aware that the EMS Authority, the Office of the Medical Director and hospitals want to reduce the number of emergency room visits for non-emergency conditions. AMR helps by gathering data to facilitate transport at the right time to the right hospital. Through this effort, the EMS Authority and hospitals can better control costs and increase revenues.

AMR learns from its field personnel. There are many AMR employees that interact with customers. Everyone AMR comes in contact with are customers, including citizens, firefighters, law enforcement, hospitals, etc. It's critical to gather information in order to evaluate the satisfaction level of AMR's customers.

Fact-based information is the life-blood of the AMR operation. Data compilation and analysis is critical. AMR has established key performance indicators (KPIs) as a measurement of meeting objectives. Information is constantly evaluated, benchmarks are established and plans are implemented. This data is shared with Pinellas County. AMR utilizes world class benchmarking in technology, supply, equipment and service delivery.

The focus is on prevention. Prevention reduces deficiencies. There are several key control points where an agency can be vulnerable to failure. By monitoring these key points, it is possible to flag and correct deficiencies earlier in the process. In addition, evaluating this data can illustrate trends in service.

AMR utilizes cross-functional teams to guide progress of the organization. AMR is designed to deliver data in a reasonable time frame, including response time compliance.

Jim Lanier, Communications Center Manager, AMR

Mr. Lanier has been with AMR for approximately 15 years.

When a person calls 9-1-1, the county dispatch center will verify the address and phone number and ship the caller to the first responder and Sunstar dispatchers. Dispatch of the ambulance and the first responder is simultaneous. On the ambulance side, the AMR dispatcher will determine the closest ambulance to the call location. How does the dispatcher determine which unit to send? System Status Management (SSM). Ambulances typically are not assigned to fire stations or other fixed facilities, but are assigned to what are called post locations. These post locations vary on a daily and hourly basis and are determined through the use of the SSM plan.

SSM is a resource management system based upon evaluation of historical data, i.e., calls for service by time of day, day of week. Through evaluation of this historical data, resources are assigned and moved around the county in anticipation of where calls historically occur. There are no geographic boundaries for ambulance assignments.

Some geographic areas are busier than others, but all areas of the county receive the same level of service and response time compliance. The assignment of ambulances is very fluid, balancing the needs for emergency and non-emergency transport services at any given time. The process moves all the time and ambulances can be switched out for closer resources as they become available to meet current demands.

The dispatchers utilize priority dispatch. ~~Pinellas County and~~ AMR Sunstar Emergency Communications utilizes certified paramedics to receive the 9-1-1 call. These emergency medical dispatchers will ask the caller a series of questions to assess the medical situation. This information will be entered into the computer aided dispatch system computer (CAD) and relayed to field ambulances and first responder units. If the situation is determined to be non-life threatening, both the first responder and the ambulance will continue to the emergency, but the ambulance will be downgraded (respond non-emergency). Sending both units to the emergency call ensures no loss of coverage to the public. AMR receives approximately 35,000 calls from 7-digit phone numbers in addition to 9-1-1 system calls.

What does all this mean? AMR's expertise produces a high-quality ambulance system countywide. AMR provides emergency response within 10 minutes, 90 percent of the time each month. This response time compliance must also be met in each district, i.e.,

you can't exceed the response time compliance in one area to the detriment of another area of the county.

By contract, all expertise and units of production must remain in Pinellas County. Vehicles and resources cannot be deployed to other markets (Hillsborough, Pasco). AMR uses closest unit response and has fluid deployment without recognition of boundaries within the county. AMR does respond and transport to other counties, including Hillsborough, Miami and Gainesville daily. Typically, these out-of-county transports from one medical facility to another are for specialty care.

AMR Statistics

Annually, on average, there are 155,000 AMR responses. This includes emergency, non-emergency, and critical-care transport. Of those, AMR transports approximately 106,000. Response time compliance is 99.2% for scheduled non-emergency, 96.2% for non-emergency, and 90.9% for emergency alarms.

In addition to medical response, AMR also provides other services:

Provides the tactical EMS program (SWAT) with the Sheriff's Office.

Provides standby at events, approximately 1,600 contact hours annually.

Public education, 250 events annually with approximately 60,000 contacts.

Logged 2.3 million miles of driving for the vehicle fleet. Provide 62 vehicles (both ambulance and support).

Workforce of 414 full and part-time personnel, including administrative staff.

It was questioned, who pays for the transport out-of-county, i.e., a transport to Gainesville? Typically the patient, medical insurance, Medicare/Medicaid, or the initiating facility will pay for the transport. The majority of the out-of-county transports are covered by medical insurance. These transfers are supported by the transport user fee and are not supported by ad valorem dollars.

Pinellas County does all the ambulance billing with a staff of 31. The transport billing rate is set at an amount to cover transport costs and is also sufficient to pay for the medical director's contract, continuing medical education contract, disposable medical supplies and County EMS administration. A ~~very small~~ percentage of user fees are uncollected. It was estimated approximately \$1.6 million was uncollected compared to approximately \$40 million billed annually. The transport user fees are self-supporting. These user fees are sufficient to pay for the transport contractor and other administrative costs as well.

AMR is paid a base amount for 8,000 transports monthly. If actual transports exceed the base number, AMR is compensated a wholesale rate of \$140 per transport in excess of the 8,000 a month.

All ambulances are staffed with at least an EMT and a paramedic, sometimes with two paramedics. Pinellas County is an all-ALS system – both first responders and ambulances. There is a minimum of one paramedic on all ALS units in accordance with state standards. The only departments in the county that are EMT-level versus paramedic-level are Airport Crash Rescue and Belleair Bluffs. The difference between EMT and paramedic is the number of educational hours required to be certified and the level of medical skills they are allowed to perform.

The ambulances are owned by AMR, but through the contract, provide a lease-back option to the county. If AMR were to default or withdraw from the contract, Pinellas County would retain the vehicles. The only equipment used daily by AMR that is not owned by AMR is the radio system. AMR's communication center is located at the Sunstar Building/Pinellas County EMS/Fire Administration on Ulmerton Road.

It was noted that AMR employees recently organized into the International Association of EMTs and Paramedics.

A handout was distributed, listing the various awards and recognitions Sunstar has received over the years, including receiving ambulance service (CAAS) accreditation., Listing of awards is accessible on the website <http://www.sunstar-ems.com/about/awards.asp>.

From a handout provided describing American Medical Response: Every day, AMR develops caring solutions to meet community needs. We are professionals, meeting the highest performance standards. We are a partner who offers the assurance of respect, one person at a time. The dignity of compassion. The security of responsiveness and reliability. The confidence of competence. And integrity you can believe in.

Dave Diaker, President, Pinellas County Council of Firefighters

The Pinellas County Council of Firefighters (council) is affiliated with the Florida Professional Firefighters and the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF). The IAFF is well know for it's charitable efforts in collecting funds for the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA). Over the years, millions have been raised by firefighters through boot drives to support Jerry's kids.

There are 11 labor locals in Pinellas County representing 20 fire departments. The council was formed in 1988, representing 1050 members - full-time firefighters and EMS personnel. Most of the 11 labor groups have 100 percent participation of their eligible employees. The only non-union department within the county is Airport Crash Rescue.

The IAFF is politically active at the local, state and federal level for the promotion of firefighter benefits and safety.

The council supports several of the issues presented by the fire chiefs at the July 14 committee meeting. These include pursuing the feasibility of a countywide insurance consortium and the addition of regional training centers to reduce out-of-service and travel time.

The council would be in favor of regional consolidation provided there was no decrease in firefighter pay or benefits. The council would work in cooperation with other agencies on an implementation plan. It was noted the council is currently regionalized to a certain extent, i.e., some of the larger labor unions already represent several other departments in addition to their own. It was asked, how is it decided who represents who, and why are some departments represented by a different local? It was indicated some smaller locals may not have sufficient resources of their own, or may prefer to affiliate with a larger local.

The council supports staffing of apparatus in accordance with NFPA 1710 and the state's 2-in/2-out rule that requires four firefighters to be assembled prior to an interior attack. Appropriate staffing levels is a safety consideration. It was indicated if the committee were interested, the council could provide another indepth session on NFPA 1710 and staffing and a video is available for review.

Rick Koda, Pinellas County Council of Firefighters

Rick Koda is a Lieutenant/Paramedic with 16 years with Seminole Fire Department, and worked for the ambulance company prior to that. He indicated the firefighters agree with the fire chiefs on fire-based transport. Currently, fire and EMS services are functionally consolidated in the county because of consolidated dispatch and automatic aid. He indicated he was recently at a Lealman fire that had apparatus from as far north as Clearwater.

He indicated the labor group supported the fire chiefs' suggestions related to ISO, water supply/hydrants, standardized training and facilities, and fire department emergency transport. He also indicated the firefighters support the county's centralized dispatch, cooperative purchasing and the creation of an insurance consortium.

The Pinellas County Council of Firefighters met with County Administrator Spratt on March 21 to discuss concerns with the ambulance company's contract compliance. At that time, AMR had been out of response-time compliance for emergency transports. AMR's staffing difficulties had increased the incidence of fire department's providing emergency transport because of the unavailability of AMR ambulances.

Prior to today's fire/EMS taskforce meeting, the dispatch center was contacted as to the number of ambulances currently running in the system. The information provided was that there were 29 ambulances in the county --14 on emergency calls, 6 on non-emergency calls and 9 available for assignment. It was indicated by the dispatch center that this was a good level for 2:15 p.m. It is the council's opinion that this is the fundamental flaw of system status management. The ambulance system is attempting to do two different things, both emergency and non-emergency calls. It had previously been noted that 60 percent of the transport demand is emergency-related with 40 percent of the demand related to non-emergency.

Non-emergency calls are primarily interfacility transports, i.e., transfers from nursing homes to hospitals, and transfers from one medical facility to another. These non-emergency calls take away from the availability to respond to emergency calls of a more urgent nature, i.e., cardiac arrest. The ambulance contractor utilizes system status management as a tool to run the minimum possible number of ambulances at any given time based upon historical review. At times assigned resources are insufficient to cover the demand. Examples were given where a non-emergency patient was delayed because the assigned ambulance was diverted to an emergency call and where there are delays in the arrival of an ambulance to an emergency call because transport units had to travel great distances.

He indicated there are other concerns with the current system. He indicated ambulance personnel worked very hard, usually working 12-hour shifts without facilities. Ambulance personnel are constantly running, as reflected in the two million miles traveled. Ambulance units are strategically placed, but they are constantly moved to meet anticipated future work load. This results in very difficult working conditions for AMR personnel. These poor working conditions result in a high turn-over rate of ambulance personnel and may result in inexperienced workers providing medical care to the system. This turn-over is a concern of the council because current protocols require the first responder to transfer patient care to the ambulance paramedic when a transport is necessary.

He indicated turn over is not necessarily unique to the ambulance company, there is fire department turn-over as well. Certified paramedics are a premium. Typically, ambulance personnel will leave AMR for employment with the fire service, creating more turn-over.

The council indicated another flaw of the current system is that AMR is a for-profit system. AMR is currently owned by Laidlaw (based in Canada), and was previously owned by a company based in Japan. The council contends that funds from the system should be retained in the county rather than transferred outside the United States.

The council proposes a different system that would ensure emergency and non-emergency transport resources would not interfere with each other. A contractor could be retained for the provision of non-emergency transports. This workload can be easily planned based upon historical data because the majority of interfacility transports are during daylight hours, Monday-Friday. Emergency calls, on the other hand, are not as

easily planned. The council's contention is the best system for emergency transport would be fire-based. Fire stations are strategically located countywide for the provision of rapid response times.

The council recommends the Pinellas County Fire/EMS Authority, in conjunction with the fire departments, conduct a feasibility of a fire-based transport system model. The council proposes a 4-tier system:

Tier 1 - Fire department ambulances strategically placed by the Fire/EMS Authority based upon historic call volume and geographic location.

Tier 2 - Fire department rescue trucks currently in place in regional response areas (currently 27 rescues countywide).

Tier 3 - Fire department transport units that could be staffed by on-duty firefighters when needed (currently 9 non-staffed transports countywide).

Tier 4 - a) Private contractor agreement.
b) Call back of firefighter personnel, examples include tropical storm, terrorism or other disasters.

This proposal would be a benefit to the transport system and would also provide an increase in firefighting capabilities through the utilization of cross-trained EMTs and paramedics as firefighters. This could increase the number of certified firefighters available to respond to emergencies, could increase the number of firefighters provided on the emergency scene, and improve staffing requirements recommended by the Insurance Services Office (ISO).

It was stated that the system would not necessarily require all EMTs and paramedics to immediately become firefighters, that it could be phased in over time. The council gave a brief example of the transition in Hillsborough County where many EMTs and paramedics became cross-trained as firefighters, but that some of the more tenured employees did not seek that option.

It was asked, how many of the 1,050 firefighters are certified as EMT or paramedic? The response was nearly all of them. The few that are not EMT or paramedic certified would most likely be veteran employees that were hired prior to EMT/paramedic becoming an integral part of the job. Of the 1,050 firefighters, approximately 600 are certified as paramedics.

The county stated the qualities of individuals on both sides of the system are comparable and they are comfortable that individuals are well-trained at an appropriate level for their positions. It was agreed there is a high turn-over, but this is consistent nationwide for both the ambulance service and the fire service.

The county indicated the ambulance contractor provides approximately 106,000 transports annually, with the fire departments performing approximately 120 - 150

transports on average. When AMR was having issues with their response time compliance a few months ago, it did result in an increase of the incidence of fire department transports, however even with the increase, it was not statistically significant. The county has been working with AMR to ensure contract compliance, and noted the emergency response compliance missed the 90th percentile by only a few calls.

It was stated the focus of the EMS system is both on life-saving and financial considerations. That a split system for transport may not be competitive in terms of cost. The current process provides a high level of quality through the terms and conditions of the ambulance contract. Also, transports are provided at a discount rate and all excess user fees collected are used to offset the cost of other components of the EMS system. It was stated that this is not to diminish the fire service in this county, but it is an economic position with respect to transport. A committee member suggested a study could be conducted to evaluate the feasibility of a split transport system.

It was questioned about the 4-tier proposal, how would the departments deal with increased out-of-service time to complete a transport (involved time increased from approximately 20 minutes to 1 hour)? The council's response is that it would be similar to what is in place now except the ambulances would be staffed by fire department FF/EMTs and FF/paramedics focusing only on emergency calls. These ambulances would be geo-based, based on historical data. These staffed ambulances would be in addition to the current rescues that are in service in the system. The example given was in St. Petersburg, with 12 stations, there could be potentially an additional number of fire-based ambulances in service in addition to the available rescue vehicles.

The council stated the 4-tier proposal would improve personnel working conditions and would provide continuity of care for the patient.

It was asked whether patients transported by fire department resources receive a bill (user fee)? Yes, all persons that receive a ride in an ambulance receive a bill from Pinellas County. In addition, both agencies - fire and AMR, are required to submit a billable run report within two days of transport. Failure to do so results in a penalty to the transport provider. It was noted that the billing process has improved tremendously over the last few years. The county stated that a few years ago, they were audited by Medicare for transport billing. The county was deducted for ~~\$1.4~~ \$1.6 million in Medicare reimbursements as not meeting medical necessity. After a tedious process and a four-year appeal period of time, the county was able to prove this was an inappropriate audit penalty and received the funds back from Medicare.

The new contract with the ambulance contractor provides tighter requirements for completeness and accuracy of transport reports (including valid zip codes) to facilitate the billing process. In addition, there have been staffing changes in the billing office that places the emphasis on good business practices from a CPA and audit perspective. It was questioned, how is it possible that with increasing costs, the countywide EMS millage has been reduced or maintained at the same level for so many years? This is

primarily due to increased property values and by doing a better job in the collection of user fees.

It is a fair assumption that Pinellas County has a more expensive system. It provides for excellent response times of paramedic-staffed units to provide for increased survival rates. The system is redundant in a way, in that it provides two paramedics and two EMTs at the door of nearly every 9-1-1 EMS call through the dual response of both a first responder and an ambulance. The County stated through the use of priority dispatch, decisions could be made to eliminate the double response of fire and AMR units. Currently, the ambulance can be canceled or downgraded. It could be possible for fire to go to priority dispatch as well for EMS calls.

General Discussion

There was discussion about AMR being unionized. Florida is a right-to-work state, however public sector employees are prohibited from striking. Do AMR employees have the right to strike? Commitment from AMR has been received that this will not occur, and in any event, Pinellas County has an emergency takeover plan in place.

There was discussion of the upcoming August 11 meeting in which the county administrator, city mayors, city managers, chairs/fire districts are invited to express their view points. It was noted there may be a conflict in the county administrator's schedule which may necessitate an additional meeting for the county's counterpoint of the information that's been presented to date. It was also discussed whether formal questions should be prepared for the upcoming meeting, since it is unlikely a spokesperson will be designated from the diverse group.

The chair noted the time table for the taskforce is to have a report by October, so additional meetings may need to be scheduled to meet the deadline. It was noted it may be desirable to also have a presentation of the legal aspects of fire/EMS service modifications and the charter review process. It was suggested it may be more beneficial to develop specific questions so that legal can do the necessary research prior to providing a presentation.

A committee member distributed a rough outline that could potentially serve as the framework for the development of the committee's report. It was stated more detailed financial information may be necessary once the committee begins working on specific recommendations. It was also stated this committee is about as far along in the process as the other task forces in that all are still in the fact-gathering stages.

Next meeting, August 11, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Largo Training Center

Invited to express view points: County administrator, city mayors, city managers, chairs of independent special fire districts.

Meeting adjourned 5:55 p.m.

Note: Clarification information will be provided by Pinellas County at a later date

8/25/03
Handout

**County Responses to prior presentations made by Fire Chiefs and Council of
Firefighter Officials to the Pinellas Assembly
Fire & EMS Structure and Funding Task Force**

Re: Presentations to the Fire/EMS Task Force

Overall, the presentation by the Fire Chiefs accurately reflects the current state of the EMS and Fire Protection Systems in Pinellas County. The County concurs there are many world-class features of the system, which is based upon the working relationships between the Cities, Fire Districts and the County.

There are three primary areas in which the Task Force should understand the EMS Authority's perspective and how it differs from the Fire Chief's view:

Issue #1: "Over the term of the contract, costs were diverted from the EMS to the fire side because of the EMS compensation cap."

The EMS Authority disagrees. The County's EMS funding model is based upon the Marginal Cost of upgrading an existing firefighter position on a fire truck into a firefighter/paramedic position.

The County is not aware of any county in Florida, which provides funding to municipal Fire Departments or Fire Districts to provide ALS First Responder Services.

The County believes it should be paying for only "authorized" paramedic positions on first responder rescue units. In the last ten years, agencies have unilaterally promoted many paramedics into administrative positions such as: Chief Officer, Fire Prevention/Inspection, District Chief, Lieutenant and other positions not directly rendering EMS patient care, which has inflated the number of paramedics they employ, and possibly increased associated management personnel expenses.

In addition, departments have increased the number of field Firefighter/Paramedic positions in lieu of Firefighter/EMT positions. This aids in their staffing flexibility. However, this additional field paramedic staffing is not required by the County's ALS First Responder Agreement. Overall, this has equated to an increased number of system paramedics. The EMS Authority believes these positions should be funded by the various Fire Protection budgets. As of July 23, 2003, there are 549 County Certified Paramedics serving in Fire/Rescue Agencies. This compares to a contractual requirement of 296 authorized, EMS funded, paramedic positions to staff 59 ALS First Responder Engine (1 Paramedic) and Rescue (2 Paramedic) Companies. This equates to 253 additional firefighter paramedics more than required in the ALS First Responder Agreements.

If ALS First Responder funding is compared to authorized EMS positions, then most departments are appropriately funded to cover authorized EMS expenditures (i.e. paramedic salary/benefits, EMS Equipment, and EMS Coordination). There are also several agencies,

which are over funded in the current agreement, but none are considered under funded for contracted EMS services.

Issue #2: “Why are there two separate structures and charges for the same people for fire and EMS services? Approximately 80 percent of the fire departments’ responses are medical related, yet EMS funding is approximately 27 percent of the total budget.”

The EMS Authority disagrees. Call volume and the cost of rendering services are two very different things relative to the deliver of ALS First Responder Service by Fire Departments. First, an EMS call typically requires one Fire Department Unit staffed with two personnel at a minimum. There is a minimal use of equipment and the EMS Authority provides all medical supplies to the contractors at no charge.

In contrast, a Fire call requires multiple Fire Department Units and personnel. The Fire Chiefs described a typical Structure Fire response, which include three (3) Fire Engines, a Ladder Truck, a Rescue, a Squad and a District Chief. This typical response requires a great deal of specialized equipment including specialized vehicles such as aerial trucks, protective clothing, breathing apparatus, hoses, nozzles, ground adders, hydraulic and gasoline powered hand tools, etc.

The provision of Fire Service is manpower and equipment intensive. In contrast, EMS Services are not. It would be improper to push departmental funding conveniently toward the County, and EMS, when the majority of the costs are for traditional Fire Services readiness and response.

The EMS Special Act of the Legislature (Chapter 80-585, Laws of Florida), which formed the Pinellas County EMS Authority, allows for the collection and distribution of property tax solely for the provision of Emergency Medical Services.

Issue #3: “The chiefs agree emergency transport by fire departments would improve the level of service to the community through the use of cross-trained firefighter/paramedics.”

The EMS Authority disagrees. First, we do not believe all cities to be in unanimous agreement. Furthermore, all Pinellas County ALS units whether Fire/Rescue or Sunstar, carry identical equipment and medications, use the exact same protocols, and have identically trained and credentialed EMT and Paramedic personnel. There is no difference in the “level of service” between a Fire/Rescue ALS Unit and a Sunstar ALS unit.

The EMS Authority purchases Ambulance Services to meet a response time specification of 10:00 minutes, 90% of the time. If this time interval were reduced, there would be no need for ALS First Responder Services (which have a response time performance of 7:30 minutes, 90% of the time.) The “level of service” as it relates to response time is world-class. Increasing the “level of service” would mean increasing costs without an assessment of any potential clinical outcome improvement or other benefit gained, if any.

Currently, Fire/Rescue transports only one of every 1,000 patients transported on an emergency basis when a Sunstar unit has not yet arrived on the scene. By purchasing a lower response time, the private ambulance company could increase its “level of service.” However, it is unclear if

that would improve the outcome of patients, whose medical needs are met on scene, prior to transport.

Contract Ambulance Services are considerably less expensive as compared to ALS First Responder Services. This is because a private company is able to flexibly staff and deploy resources (neither is typical in the Fire Service). Further, pension and benefit costs are considerably higher for public employees as compared to private employees.

During the last Ambulance Service RFP, the consortium of cities was unable to submit a viable proposal. Further, only one city submitted a bid, and it featured a partnership with a private transport company. This bid was quoted as the highest price received, and judged by the selection committee to be lowest in points scored.

Issue #4: There is no comparison available to our fire services because we are so unique.

The County Disagrees. We believe there are numerous “general” comparisons, which may be made to compare our services with other fire service jurisdictions. These may include cost per call, number of firefighters per 1000 population, cost per station and ISO ratings as examples.

The county also believes that firefighter paramedics are routinely dispatched to fight fires (man hose lines, make interior attack, etc., and therefore reduce the number of available EMS units.

Issue #5: The ambulance system is failing by trying to do both emergency and non-emergency transports.

The County believes the ambulance service is not failing and has served the citizens and patients well over the last sixteen years using the same deployment methods and business model. Having an exclusive transport market provides economies, which balance the county’s good and poor user fee receivables. Our ambulance transport services were consolidated in 1987. This business model continues to be extremely successful and provides excellent clinical controls for medical direction.

The ambulances paramedics carry identical equipment and medications, use the exact same clinical protocols, and have identically trained and credentialed EMT and Paramedic personnel. Since Sunstar paramedics only practice medicine, (not train for and fight fires) their career is 100% focused on patient care. Ambulance paramedics work shorter shifts than the fire service and work from their vehicles, similar to the law enforcement deployment model. Flexible deployment has been serving Pinellas County, its citizens and patients well for over 16 years. The system is not failing; rather it keeps costs down; clinical quality and efficiency up.

Issue #6: “Ambulance profits should not be going out of the County.”

The ambulance company payroll, which equates to millions of dollars each year stays in Pinellas in the form of paychecks. The ambulance company is also responsible for expensive capital improvements that AMR reinvests in our system. Some examples include 51 brand new ambulances trucks every five to six years, on board truck computers, mobile data terminals, dispatch computer upgrades, etc. These reinvestments/improvements come from their profit.

8/25/03
Handout

Author: Jerry Knie

PINELLAS ASSEMBLY TASK GROUP ON FIRE AND EMS

Disclaimer:

This document is intended ONLY as a paper of observations for discussion purposes. It is not intended to be construed in any way as recommendations from the Pinellas Assembly Task Group on Fire and EMS.

The observations contained herein are the result of issues raised in the presentations made to the task group, and have been formatted as issues to discuss within the membership of the task group.

Issues for discussion;

1. Develop a program that provides for the payment in lieu of taxes for those properties, which for various reasons are exempt from ad valorem taxation but whose need for and utilization of Fire and EMS services is commensurate with property, which currently pays ad valorem taxes.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; Distribution of costs.

2. Continue development and refine the program of joint purchasing initiated by the Fire Chiefs with participation in the use of the selected vendors a condition of the fire contracts and receiving of County funds.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; Assessing levels of service and cost.

3. Initiate steps to make all Pinellas County unincorporated areas, as much as possible, one consolidated fire district with uniform Fire taxation County wide, while continuing to contract with the nearest appropriate fire and EMS agency for services.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; More equitable assignment of costs from consolidating districts.

4. Conduct a study of the issues, successes and failures of counties in Florida, which have consolidated fire and EMS services under county government and compare it to the current Pinellas County model. The purpose of which is to determine the cost and benefits of such an initiative.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; Evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable assignment of costs from consolidating districts.

5. Initiate a surcharge on Utilities for the funding of the Pinellas County Hazardous Materials Team.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; More equitable assignments of costs.

6. Initiate an ordinance and policy of diligently pursuing cost recovery from
-

commercial carriers and entities whose enterprise results in a hazardous materials incident resulting in costs to the emergency services.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; More equitable assignment of costs.

7. Considering that the availability of technical rescue, below grade and confined space rescue is provided through the Pinellas County fire services. The result of which permits various utilities and other agencies to rely on public services rather than a requirement to provide their own. The County should initiate a policy of soliciting fees or contributions from those agencies to continue to provide those services.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; More Equitable assignment of costs.

8. On the issue of the Fire Service, Emergency Medical Service component conducting ambulance transportation as part of their services. A Countywide policy should be initiated that permits Fire Service Rescue units that are equipped and licensed as ambulances to transport EMS patients under liberal guidelines when it is in the best interest of the patient and provides a higher level of emergency medical services. It should be noted that who ever transports the patient, the revenue to the County is the same.

It should be also recommended that the County, which is one of the approving authorities, place no undue restrictions on licensing units as ambulances.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; Evaluation of whether costs might be improved by combining EMS with partially or fully consolidation fire protection services.

9. Following a statistical review of ISO ratings throughout Pinellas County, The County should act as facilitator and begin an initiative to have ISO rate Pinellas County as a whole. The purpose of which is to improve the classification for fire insurance purposes with a target of class three or better. Existing entities whose classification is currently at a three or better would remain in that class while those below a class three would achieve an improved rating.

The result of the above would reduce fire insurance premiums on commercial properties and to a lesser extent on the fire portion of homeowners insurance throughout the County.

Relationship to the Task Force Goals; Conduct a study County wide to assess levels of service.

8/25/03
Handout

**Pinellas Assembly
Fire & EMS Structure and Funding Task Force
August 11, 2003**

- The County favors fire departments voluntarily regionalizing for cost savings.
- The County believes those who benefit from Hazmat & Tech Rescue (cities and fire districts) should financially support those specialty teams.
- Combined countywide EMS and Fire can be a tax, but not an assessment. EMS benefits people, not property, per Chapter 80-585, Laws of Florida, and a recent Florida Supreme Court decision.
 - o The County believes it is fruitful for the Task Force to consider using fire assessments. Considerations may include a common tax or assessment (1) for county unincorporated areas only or (2) instituted countywide.
 - o Districts would be able to distribute their resources such as district chiefs, fire investigators and automatic aid without worrying about who is paying the cost.
- The County believes a centrally location burn building/training center is sufficient, based upon its location at the "timed travel" center of the County, to provide greatly improved training over those currently available.
- The County favors annual EMS funding audits with reimbursement for overpayments.
- The County favors a single countywide ISO Rating as long as none increase.
- The County favors true Priority Dispatch for both EMS and Fire to maximize resource utilization.

The County believes the charge of the task force includes finding fiscal efficiency through:

- Can more be saved in group benefits purchasing and insurance?
- Examining comparisons with other fire agencies around the nation to see where we stack up.
- Countywide ISO Rating.
- Can fire trucks be refurbished, instead of purchasing new all the time?
- Hydrant and other fire standards, which need to be equal countywide.

Considered 8/25/03

FIRE/EMS TASK FORCE

Draft Recommendations; Stated in Concept

- ISO rating of 3 or better countywide. Action: approved unanimously
- Implement a Fire fee for non-residential, non-government tax-exempt properties. Action: Delayed for further discussion
- Recognize and encourage the current level of joint purchase of materials and equipment. Recommend joint purchase of workers' compensation and other forms of insurance, if a cost benefit results. Action: Approved unanimously

Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – September 22, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Joe Calio, Sally Foote, Sally Israel, Jerry Knight, Kathleen Litton, Tim Schuler

Staff: Gay Lancaster, (county representative), Jim Callahan (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe)

Others: Karen Seel (Chair BCC), Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Steve Fravel, Janice Metzger, Chris Staubus (Utilities), Dave Daiker (PC Council of Firefighters), Bob Siler (AMR), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), Carroll Williams (LA), Bill Naylor (SP), Dan Graves (SE), Rowland Herald (CL), Ken Cramer (PP), Michael Handoga.

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order, noting this was the first meeting since August 25.

The minutes of August 25 were approved unanimously.

Chair noted at the last meeting (8/25), the committee tentatively agreed on two issues and deferred one for additional discussion (implementation of a fire fee for non-residential, non-governmental tax exempt properties):

- To attain an ISO rating of 3 or better countywide. Passed unanimously in concept.
- Recognize and encourage the current level of joint purchase of materials and equipment. Recommend joint purchase of workers compensation and other forms of insurance, if a cost-benefit results.” Passed unanimously in concept.

The Chair reported he had attended the Pinellas Assembly Mid-term Meeting on September 3. In attendance was Karen Seel of the BCC, Co-Chair, Mayor DiDonato, various city mayors and the seven task-force representatives. At that time, interim reports were given by the various task force representatives of their work progress to date and an overview of the next steps. Based on the reports given, it appears the fire/EMS task force is perhaps ahead of the curve somewhat in the information gathering stage. It was noted that there are still very tough issues to deal with when reaching the committee's final recommendations.

The chair indicated he had met with the City and County representatives on Friday, September 19, to outline the committee's future agenda to ensure completion by the target month of January. An agenda was distributed separating the task force mandate down into four major components:

- A. Savings:
 - Consolidation and/or regionalization
 - Joint purchasing of insurance and other commodities
- B. Service improvement:

ISO Rating
Hydrants and infrastructure

- C. Equitable assignment of costs:
 - Fees
 - Tax equity
 - Technical team support
- D. EMS Transport

This was done in an attempt to organize the discussion points in the form of a work plan.

There was discussion of the fire hydrant issue. The county representative indicated Pinellas County, as the Fire Authority, has the right to establish minimum standards for fire hydrant distances. County staff are currently considering proposing a minimum standard (500') for the placement of hydrants countywide. Generally, Pinellas County is pretty well served, but there are some inequities and problem areas. These areas of concern are partly due to older infrastructure with inadequate water mains that are too small to sufficiently support fire hydrants. These problem areas affect both the County and cities' water suppliers. County 9-1-1 Emergency Communications is in the process of validating the mapping of all hydrants to ensure appropriate plotting. As a result of the Lealman incident, it was discovered not all of the hydrant mapping was as accurate as desired. It was noted, the County has purchased 41 hydrants that will be installed by the City of St. Petersburg in the Lealman area. Next, the county will focus on unincorporated areas of concern to include South Pasadena, Gandy and Bay Pines.

Committee member Foote distributed a handout for discussion. This handout included the charge from the Pinellas Assembly Policy Statement and an example "overarching goal" to be accomplished. There was lengthy discussion on the handout and the desirability of articulating the task force's charge in the form of goals rather than by general categories. This would allow the task force to formulate its recommendations based upon basic guiding principles and a desired outcome. Establishing the elements of the overarching goals will shape the thinking of the group and establish how the recommendations interrelate and serve as a roadway to accomplish those goals.

There was discussion on how to proceed further in the evaluation process, whether utilizing individual or group focus. It was generally agreed to focus on one topic each meeting using a group approach, then move to the next topic, time permitting.

The County indicated they had attempted to develop a model for discussion of fees per discussion last meeting, but was unable to do so, due to the lack of detailed data. In developing a recommendation in this area, it may be necessary to suggest an expert be engaged to provide an assessment. GSG Consultants has performed this analysis for other cities in the past. If the committee feels strongly that tax-exempt entities should pay for fire protection services, the recommendation should be posed and it will be up to the political bodies to decide whether to implement the recommendation or not. A copy of the Property Appraiser's grand certification denoting property types and total/taxable values was redistributed.

A task force member questioned, how the development codes ensure adequate water supply systems? The county advised that, through current permitting processes, water

supply is considered and addressed. It was noted that construction permits are reviewed by the fire service, with the exception of one- and 2-family residential which is primarily managed through the respective building department. The lack of adequate water supply in some areas is primarily due to aged infrastructure prior to the initiation of stringent building codes (prior to the 1970s). There was a general historical discussion of the progression of water supply improvements throughout Pinellas County. There was also lengthy discussion relative to the development and permitting process and how water supply considerations play into that review. There was also general discussion about fire sprinkler retrofit in high-rises. Legislation was passed last year that allows high-rise (>74 feet) condominiums to opt out of the sprinkler retrofit requirements with a 2/3 vote of the homeowners. It was generally thought that it is unlikely the County could convince the legislature to repeal the statewide legislation, but that there may be methods to implement a localized exception to the code through either legislation, referendum, or through the Pinellas County Construction and Licensing Board (PCCLB), who has authority over local building codes. The committee generally agreed that a recommendation should be included to strongly endorse the establishment of minimum standards for water supply and hydrant placement countywide. The County is to provide draft language for consideration.

The chair acknowledged the presence of BCC Chair Karen Seel. Ms. Seel advised she has been attempting to visit all of the task forces to acknowledge and thank the committee members for their participation and efforts in this very important endeavor.

There was a brief discussion about consolidation versus regionalization. It was the general consensus of the group that additional discussion may be necessary. At this time, it seems there is no particular benefit or driving force for this recommendation. It was stated that regionalization or reduction of the number of fire districts may make sense, but that current fire and EMS service contracts may make it a long-term endeavor. There have been some changes in the make-up, primarily due to annexations, contractual agreements (Tierra Verde, Ft. Desoto, Gandy, High Point) and through the creation of special independent fire districts. It was generally thought that these consolidations could happen naturally over time, and that it is unlikely to occur or be successful through the application of pressure.

There was additional discussion on the topic of fees. The County indicated their attorney was uncertain whether some entities could be charged a fee based on their current tax-free status, i.e., schools, hospitals, etc.). St. Petersburg indicated they had previously studied the fee-based structure, but had opted not to go forward with the implementation. A handout was provided that outlined St. Petersburg's proposed assessment structure that was completed as a component of this fee study. It was noted that many of the assessments were not insurmountable, but that there were some large users of fire protection resources that would have been required to pay a significant amount if the fee system would have been implemented. As proposed, this fee structure has been held up in court, but requires all entities to be assessed. If the taxing agency exempts any property group, any lost revenues would have to be absorbed by the taxing agency and cannot be diverted to the other remaining property groups.

It was noted that several governmental agencies have implemented an assessment structure, including Tallahassee, Miami and Sarasota County. It was questioned whether the assessment structure included only taxable properties, or did it include non-

taxable properties as well? This information will be clarified by the city representative and will be brought back to the next meeting. The City representative also indicated Miami will be fine-tuning its fees with the implementation of a proposed negligence user fee for issues such as false alarms and intentional brush fires. The County representative redistributed a copy of the current and proposed fee structure for the Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue District. This proposed increase in fees will be voted upon on September 23 (Note: Referendum passed).

In the areas of fire sprinklers, it was suggested a representative of the county work cooperatively with a couple of area fire chiefs to draft language for the next meeting on this topic.

The current schedule provides for meetings every-other-week through December 15 (10/6, 10/20, 11/3, 11/17, 12/1, 12/15). This would allow four meetings to discuss the four different topics and two weeks for refinement of recommendations to meet the anticipated due date in January. The committee recapped previous discussion items on ISO and water supply, noting they were primarily in category "B," service improvement. Committee member Knight volunteered to fine tune the recommendations previously agreed to (ISO and joint purchasing) for presentation at the next meeting. It was agreed to focus efforts of the 10/6 meeting to finish section B, service improvement, then move to section C, equitable assignment of costs, if time permitted.

A handout was distributed by the City representative, indicating the document was prepared by the cities' technical committee as followup information related to the county position paper and committee member Knight's outline previously discussed. A copy of a letter dated September 8, from Largo City Manager Stanton was distributed, articulating Largo's views on the county's position paper and fire and EMS services generally. There was no discussion on the contents of the letter.

The chair reminded the committee members that any email correspondence among the members should copy Angela of Ms. Lancaster's office for the purpose of maintaining public records.

Next Meeting: October 6, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Largo Training Center

Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – October 8, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Joe Calio, Sally Foote, Sally Israel, Jerry Knight, Tim Schuler (Kathleen Litton absent)

Staff: Gay Lancaster, (county representative), Jim Callahan (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe)

Others: Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Chuck Kearns (PC), Jeff Barnard (Office of Medical Director), Ed Broomes (PC Council of Firefighters), Bob Siler, Dan Stumpfhaoser, Jim Lanier (AMR), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), Carroll Williams (LA), Bill Naylor (S. PA), Dan Graves (SE), Jay Stout (SH), Rowland Herald (CL), John Frank (LE), Louis Betz,

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. The minutes of September 22 were approved unanimously.

Two handouts were provided at the beginning of the meeting.

- Memorandum from Dwaine Booth to Gay Lancaster relative to amendments to the Florida Building Code.
- First draft of policy recommendations #1 and #2 formulated by committee member Jerry Knight.

The Chair indicated today's agenda would focus on section B, service improvement. A draft recommendation for an improved ISO rating was provided, the committee is awaiting additional information on the hydrants/infrastructure issue and there was to be further discussion on the sprinkler retrofit issue.

Committee member Knight stated he had heard that the sprinkler retrofit situation may be in further jeopardy at the state level. The Pinellas County Fire Chiefs Association had reported at their October meeting that the retrofit of fire sprinklers in high-rise condominiums has the potential of being overturned entirely by the Legislature next year. The availability of fire sprinkler systems is a major public safety concern, and would still be an appropriate item to support and recommend. Committee member Calio indicated there are 11 high-rise condominium buildings on Sand Key in Clearwater that are not currently sprinklered. It was noted that since the requirement to allow owners of condominiums to vote on whether to install fire sprinklers in their high-rise condo units is contained within State Statute, the statute would have to be modified by the State Legislature to remove the exemption language. It was questioned whether the recommendation should be to pursue legislative action on a state-wide or local county amendment only. It was suggested that if the task force recommended an action, that it would be more practical to leave the recommendation as broad as possible so that it can be implemented as best as possible/feasible. The committee consensus was to accept the draft language for recommendation #3 related to fire sprinkler retrofit:

Recommendation #3: The task force supports the installation of fire sprinkler systems in all residential occupancies. The task force recommends the State Statutes be amended to require full compliance for the retrofit and installation of fire sprinkler systems in each living unit for all high-rise residential buildings greater than 75 feet in height.

Committee member Foote requested revisiting the draft recommendation on ISO. She indicated her perception was that the recommendation was to implement an ISO Class 3 rating as a recommended standard, not simply to study the issue for feasibility. Committee member Knight indicated he'd amend the language to reflect the committee's preference.

The committee discussed hydrants and infrastructure. It was agreed this item involves water supply infrastructure only, i.e., pipes in the ground, water pressure, hydrant sufficiency, water main sizes, distance to hydrants, etc. There was lengthy discussion on this topic. As the Fire Authority, the county is in the process of drafting minimum recommended standards for water supply for fire protection purposes. The chair questioned whether there were any other issues relevant for discussion on hydrants, i.e., testing and flowing, reflective hydrant markers, notification when out-of-service, etc. The county indicated that there are approximately 22,000 hydrants in the county. The City representative indicated one issue for discussion is private hydrants. As a policy, some jurisdictions do not test or flow private hydrants because of liability concerns. It is the individual complex's responsibility to ensure the proper working order of private hydrants. The County representative indicated it appears the community would expect countywide commonalities based upon uniform expectations no matter the jurisdiction. These commonalities could include the assurance of sufficient pressure and water flow for firefighting purposes, minimum distances between hydrants, and that the hydrants are in proper working order. There should be established minimum standards, to include the mechanics for enforcement of those standards. It was noted the fire departments have oversight for commercial development, but does not have jurisdiction in 1-2 family residential developments. It was decided to defer additional discussion until the next meeting on this topic. The County representative indicated she'd provide the current draft of the standard via mail for the task force's consideration prior to the next meeting.

The next topic of discussion was Section C, equitable assignment of costs. The City representative indicated he had made some follow-up contacts with Sarasota and Tallahassee on non-advalorem assessments.

Sarasota charges a non-advalorem assessment for fire protection. The residential rate is \$6.72 per 100 square feet and the commercial rate is \$13.29 per 100 square feet. Church sanctuaries are excluded, however other church facilities such as day cares, offices, residential, etc. are assessed. Governmental properties are excluded from the assessment.

Tallahassee's assessment has been in place 1-2 years. Single family homes are charged \$11.80 and multi-family apartment units are charged \$7.00 monthly. The residential assessments are incorporated into the monthly utility bill. Church sanctuaries are exempt from assessment. Commercial properties are assessed based upon square footage. Governmental buildings are provided fire protection through contracts for services that are individually negotiated. A copy of Tallahassee's Fire Rescue Funding

report will be distributed to the members via email.

It was noted that both the cities of Clearwater and St. Petersburg had previously evaluated the non-advalorem assessment, but both jurisdictions chose not to implement at that time. It was questioned whether there was the political will to implement the assessment countywide. The Lealman Fire District board member, Mr. Frank, indicated Lealman will be deliberating the concept of implementing an assessment in addition to advalorem funding as a means to equally distribute costs among residents. The Lealman Board considered this a more equitable method to generate revenues because everyone would contribute towards the cost of fire protection.

The fire chief of Clearwater gave an overview of their fee study. He indicated that the assessment amount is obtained by an evaluation of workload (call volume), then assigning the budget costs on a pro-rata basis. It was noted this creates a negative impact to some category types because of their high demand for service. If an agency were to exclude or buy down a category type such as nursing homes, those lost revenues would have to come from other general fund sources and could not be reallocated to the other category types.

It was generally agreed that the committee should continue to review this topic. One committee member indicated the concept could perhaps be a minimum uniform fee for those not currently paying, then an advalorem assessment for the remainder. It was noted the fee assessment could only be for fire services at this time. Legislative action would be necessary to combine both fire and EMS assessments together.

The County representative indicated she would inquire with the County Attorney, the legalities of the combination fee/advalorem assessment concept for fire protection services. Other items to be reviewed by the County Attorney include whether there could be a surcharge on mobile home license fees, whether it would be feasible to apply the Pinellas Suncoast Fire District fee structure in lieu of taxes, and whether it is feasible to carve out a class of tax exempt properties for the implementation of an assessment fee.

There was discussion of the uniform countywide tax rate concept. It was stated that it was unlikely a uniform countywide rate could be implemented without full fire service consolidation. A uniform rate for unincorporated areas in the dependent fire districts could be possible. Currently, dependent fire districts are assessed different millages based upon the respective jurisdiction's operating budget and assessed property values. This funding formula is set by legislation for the 13 dependent fire districts. It would most likely take a referendum to change the current funding formula. It was stated that the unincorporated county areas in the dependent districts are shrinking as a result of annexation and the creation of independent fire districts (Lealman, Palm Harbor and East Lake). It was also stated that in the event of a millage redistribution, there would be gainers and losers in that some areas would pay more and others would pay less.

It was noted that some areas have artificially low millage rates for fire protection because of the reliance on automatic aid. There was lengthy discussion relative to efficiency and effectiveness and the use of automatic aid. If the automatic aid agreement was not in place, most jurisdictions would have to add additional personnel and equipment

resources to provide a minimum level of fire protection services. For example, a minimum of 15 firefighters are necessary to perform the essential functions to mitigate a typical fire risk. Many fire departments in the county do not have this minimum level of personnel and equipment available without the use of automatic aid.

A committee member asked if it was possible to separate EMS and fire response so that it is not necessary to respond fire engines to EMS calls. The use of ALS engines is an effective way to serve areas with lower call volumes. Some fire departments utilize fire engines and others utilize separate rescue trucks based upon local demands for service. The City representative stated it is important to remember that it is the same firefighters doing both jobs, fire and EMS. Providing EMS adds very little additional cost to the system because the firefighter resources are there already. (EMS funding is based upon the marginal cost of upgrading firefighters to the paramedic level.)

It was agreed the task force would not resolve the tax equity issue at this meeting and agreed to have further discussion.

Other topics for the next meeting:

Review of draft information on hydrant infrastructure.
Information from County Attorney on legal questions on taxes and fees.
Section C, fees, tax equity and technical team support.

Next Meeting: October 20, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Largo Training Center

Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – October 20, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Joe Calio, Sally Foote, Sally Israel, Jerry Knight, Tim Schuler (Kathleen Litton absent)

Staff: Gay Lancaster, (county representative), Jim Callahan (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe)

Others: Dwaine Booth, Jim Lanier, Janice Metzger, Chuck Kearns, Bob Swain (PC), Laurie Romig, MD (Office of Medical Director), Bob Siler (AMR), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), Bill Naylor (S. PA), Dan Graves (SE)

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. The minutes of October 6 were approved unanimously.

Several handouts were provided at the beginning of the meeting.

- Letter from City Manager Frank Edmunds, Seminole.
- Letter from City Manager Wayne Logan, Safety Harbor.
- Fire Funding for Single Family Homes - Comparison from Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration.
- Draft #5 of the amendment to County Code Chapter 62 relative to fire hydrant design standards and specifications.
- Tallahassee Fire Fee Information.
- Second draft of policy recommendations #1 and #2 formulated by committee member Jerry Knight that included overarching goals:

- 1 Goal #1 To have an Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating of three or better countywide. Recommendation #1 - It is recommended that a study be undertaken by consultants with the expertise to determine if Pinellas County, as a whole, can improve its ISO (Insurance Service Office) classification to a three (3) or better. It is further recommended that if the finding is favorable, to then formally request the ISO to make an official survey of the County as a whole.
- 1 Goal #2 To achieve cost savings through joint and/or collective purchasing by fire service agencies. Recommendation #2 - It is recommended that the practice of joint purchasing for expendable supplies and commodities, uniforms and equipment be supported and encouraged in the fire service countywide. It is further recommended that a consortium of risk managers and/or purchasing directors participate in an exploratory study to determine if savings can be achieved by jointly purchasing workers compensation insurance, employee health care benefits and other non-traditional programs where joint negotiations and procurement would result in cost reductions.

The Chair indicated today's agenda was to focus on hydrant infrastructure and technical

team support. However, in consideration of the presence of two visitors, the agenda would be amended to provide an opportunity to receive information from Bob Swain, Pinellas County Attorney's Office, and Dr. Laurie Romig, the Pinellas County Medical Director.

Assistant County Attorney Bob Swain provided information on fees and assessments. He indicated assessments are possible as opposed to advalorem. The authority to levy special assessments is legal provided there is a benefit to the property owner. This method is currently utilized by various fire service providers (Tallahassee, Sarasota County, Pinellas Suncoast). The assessments can vary widely based upon local needs. The amount and method of the assessment can be determined in any way, provided it has a rational basis. The assessment would have to be based on the value of the service to the property, not on the actual value of the property itself. For example, an assessment for a home could be a flat fee, but could not be on a sliding scale based upon the value of the home. It could also be based upon the relative square footage of the home or occupancy. The taxing authority is free to determine the relative value of the tax assessment load provided it is distributed on a rational basis.

Mr. Swain indicated it is not feasible to impose a surcharge on mobile homes because this is regulated through the Department of Motor Vehicles. However, he indicated it is feasible to tax the lot that the mobile home sits on. This would vary from community to community dependent upon the number of lots contained in each park.

It was questioned whether there is a prohibition on utilizing a combination of assessments and advalorem taxation. Mr. Swain indicated it is not strictly prohibited, but could be messy to tax one group while assessing a fee to another. It could be difficult to explain the justification or rational of treating the various groups differently.

On the topic of exemptions, it was noted that both Tallahassee and Sarasota exempt church sanctuaries. Mr. Swain indicated case law and state statutes are silent on exemptions. In the event of a legal challenge or appeal, the taxing authority would be required to explain what rational basis was used to allow the exemption.

The task force discussed the Pinellas Suncoast fee schedule. It was noted that it includes a wide range of charges primarily based upon square footage. This independent fire district, located within Pinellas County, has been utilizing a fee assessment for a long, long time.

The county attorney indicated that in order to be legal, the taxing authority must be able to defend the assessment by describing and/or explaining the rational for the exemption. There could also be issues on how to define the exemption, for example, what constitutes a church sanctuary? Square footage, occupancy load, etc.

It was questioned whether it would be possible to leave the current advalorem process in place and assess a fee only to those that are currently tax exempt? He indicated this would be an apples/oranges type of situation, in that it would not be fair to selectively assess some and not others. It would not be recommended to leave the fire advalorem tax in place plus an assessment. Utilizing a combination of the two would require a delicate balance and a comprehensive benefit analysis of the cost of fire protection

services to justify the allocations. It was generally agreed that governmental properties should be excluded because of double-taxation issues.

It was noted that utilizing an assessment fee for every structure in Pinellas County (with an exemption for governmental facilities) would reach those that are not currently paying for the costs of fire protection due to their homestead exemption or tax status.

At this time, the Chair welcomed Pinellas County Board of Commissioners Chair Karen Seel, who joined the meeting. She stated she just wanted to thank the task force members again for the hard work and time dedicated to the evaluation effort.

Committee member Knight indicated he had a question on the fire funding comparison handout distributed earlier. He noted that it only compared the unincorporated county areas within the dependent fire districts and the Pinellas Suncoast and Tallahassee fee schedules. He questioned whether each area could have their own fee structure, or would the assessment have to be countywide. The county attorney indicated that there are currently a series of MSTU millage rates for dependent fire districts. Would it be possible to switch to an assessment by each district, or could you implement a uniform assessment countywide for the dependent fire districts? Either way is possible because the county is the sole taxing authority for these specific unincorporated county areas. If this were to be done, it would require an ordinance change for the unincorporated areas and a modification of the contracts with the respective cities.

It was questioned, if the assessment fee system were instituted, would it be necessary to go to referendum to escalate fees, or would the county have the authority to increase fees as necessary to cover the specific financial needs. This could be done either way as well, dependent upon the way it is established initially within the enabling ordinance. For example, with the current language, the county commission has the authority to set the fire millage rate based upon the financial need up to the millage cap established for each dependent fire district.

Committee member Calio questioned if it is feasible to assess home owners by the advalorem method and tap into the eight billion dollars of tax-exempt properties through an assessment fee? The county attorney indicated it would not be the preferred method because there could be issues with tax equity and equal protection. It would be preferable to not utilize a mixed assessment/taxation plan because it could be less defensible or justifiable.

Committee member Schuler questioned, if an assessment plan was used exclusively, would it also target those properties that are currently tax exempt? Yes, an assessment would be applicable to everyone that utilizes fire protection, including those that are tax exempt.

Chairman Hooper questioned, if the committee were to make a recommendation for all districts to use a user fee process, would it have to be uniform countywide? With each jurisdiction having different costs, how could you implement a uniform assessment? The county attorney indicated the assessment can work provided you are dealing with a single taxing entity. Implementing a uniform assessment across the entire county would most likely require consolidation. It is possible to implement a uniform

assessment for each taxing authority, i.e., the county as the unincorporated county taxing authority could implement a uniform assessment for all unincorporated residents in the dependent fire districts. It was noted that a uniform countywide assessment without consolidation could result in cost shifting because some areas have higher costs than others.

There was further discussion on the topic of whether some agencies could be advalorem based and others could be assessment based. It was indicated there would be no problem if one city was one way (assessment based) and another city or county utilized another way (advalorem based), provided it was consistently applied within each taxing authority.

The County representative noted that the result of equalizing the advalorem for the dependent fire districts would result in winners and losers (some areas' millages would increase while others would decrease). If sufficient additional properties were included into the fee assessment pool, it could possibly result in lower rates overall. Currently, approximately \$11 billion of property values are inaccessible because of their tax-exempt status.

Committee member Foote indicated the goal should not be that everyone has to pay, but that all the users that receive the service should pay. That if a consistent millage rate is not doable, an assessment fee may be. The goal would be to articulate why an assessment fee is fair from the user point of view.

It was questioned whether other church-owned properties or non-profits pay advalorem taxes based upon the designated use? It was also questioned if the categories could be implemented over time in a stair-step approach rather than all at once. The county attorney indicated it would not be recommended to use a piece-meal approach. In order to be defensible, it should be implemented across the board. As to exemptions for schools, it could be defined based upon a governmental exclusion for public schools, or could be defined to exempt all schools, both public and private, based upon a defined social value or public concern. It was again noted that governmental should most likely be excluded because of the double-taxation issue.

The chair questioned if the committee would want to exempt governmental properties? Would the committee want to exempt public, private, or all schools? The attorney responded that it is unclear territory because assessment fees are not heavily litigated. The assessment could be imposed until challenged. The fewer exemptions to the assessment would be better and/or safer from a legal perspective. The theory of an assessment, at its base, is that all who benefit pay. The models reviewed (Tallahassee, Sarasota, Pinellas Suncoast) do have exemptions, and these are not prohibited provided they are made utilizing a rational basis. The exclusion of tax supported (governmental) agencies are easy to defend.

Committee member Knight posed a question in the area of cost equalization. If the unincorporated area utilized an assessment fee, churches would be taxed in the county, but they would not be taxed if they were in the adjoining city that utilizes an advalorem taxation structure. Is it doable to bring 23 taxing municipalities together? Can the county MSTU set a fee rate for all costs for the county MSTU for fire protection? The

County representative indicated the collective advalorem tax for fire contracts is approximately 2.6 mills. The combined fire department advalorem provided by unincorporated residents generates approximately \$16 million (Note, excluding independent fire districts). It was noted that three cities and the city's technical group are on record as not supporting a uniform millage countywide. The Chair indicated it appears the unincorporated areas could implement an assessment fee process, thus reducing the county MSTU for fire protection.

Committee member Knight noted that fragmented implementation of assessment fees could create moral and ethical issues related to annexation. Committee member Foote indicated it could not be accomplished piecemeal. If the goal or preferred method across the board would be to implement assessment fees in lieu of advalorem, that is the recommendation that should be made. This would tap into the \$11 billion in properties that currently do not pay. This in turn would result in lower costs to the others. Secondary to the principle that users pay, it would also result in a more equitable distribution of costs.

The Chair indicated some cities must staff additional personnel because of possible exposure, i.e., large hospitals, etc. Committee member Knight indicated that the better job the fire service does (in fire prevention), fewer actual fires is the measure of success.

The Chair indicated the assessment fee topic is worthy of consideration for formulation of a recommendation. It was questioned whether it should be an all or nothing approach. There was not general consensus on this issue. There were concerns that utilizing a one-step approach would die a natural death right away because all entities would not be willing to make that step. It was suggested that it may be better to tackle the unincorporated area first and that by laying this groundwork, the cities may eventually come on board as a natural progression. It was suggested that the committee could make a recommendation that each jurisdiction evaluate and consider going to an assessment fee-based process. It was also noted that the recommendation should suggest utilizing as few exemptions as possible.

Committee member Knight indicated there could be 24 different ways to implement assessment fees, based on differing methodology, but that in all cases, the tax exempt properties would start contributing to the costs of fire protection. An example was given that utilizing the \$11 billion in tax-exempt property, based on a millage of 2.284, would generate \$24 million in new revenue.

A concept idea was proposed. Recommend countywide implementation of assessment fees with limited exemptions (governmental and public schools) with each jurisdiction recommended to transcend from advalorem to fee-based assessment. This transition would be on a taxing jurisdiction by taxing jurisdiction basis. Motion passed unanimous. Committee member Knight to formalize draft recommendation for a future meeting.

Dr. Romig, the Pinellas County Medical Director, was invited to address the committee. She indicated she was present to answer any questions from the task force related to emergency medical services. She indicated that the Pinellas County EMS system runs in a very effective and efficient manner. The system utilizes fire-based first responders, a private ambulance company, and the county provides the billing. She indicated the

residents and visitors in Pinellas County receive quality clinical care. The Office of the Medical Director continuously reviews medical protocols, reexamines drug treatment protocols, and has a management system in place for determining hospital capabilities for patient flow. The system takes care of the patient promptly. The first responder begins treatment of the patient prior to the arrival of an ambulance. Once on-scene, the ambulance continues patient care and transportation to the hospital. All components of the EMS system are governed by medical protocol.

On the topic of fire-based medical transport, there are medical protocols in place that allow the first-responders to transport patients under certain circumstances. These are based upon patient criticality or local environmental conditions (climate, angry bystanders, extended ETA of the ambulance). These protocols allow the first responder to contact on-line medical control to receive authorization for a fire-based transport. It was noted that the number of fire department transports comprise approximately 1/10 of one percent of the system transports. There is a quality assessment of the process. Dr. Romig indicated she would have concerns if the transport protocols were loosened because it may undermine the system.

Committee member Knight indicated that in the current first-responder system, there are approximately 20 transport-capable rescue units and that it would be a benefit to the patient to allow these units to transport on an as-appropriate basis. This would perhaps be more efficient and safer by utilizing only one vehicle instead of the current practice of two (1st responder and ambulance contractor). Dr. Romig indicated the use of the transport contractor allows the first-responder to return to available status quicker. If the fire rescue unit were to perform the transport, it would be out of service for a longer period of time. If it is clinically important to get the patient to the hospital, a policy is in place to accomplish that.

Committee member Knight indicated that as an example, St. Petersburg has ten transport capable rescue vehicles. Also, St. Petersburg has close proximity to several hospitals. It is proposed that these medical transports could be accomplished by fire rescue in a shorter amount of time than awaiting the ambulance contractor. He indicated that these vehicles are fully equipped, the personnel are appropriately trained, and local conditions are favorable to minimize the length of time to effect a transport. He indicated that this may not be as feasible in other areas of the county where first-responders are not equipped with rescue vehicles, or are not in close proximity to medical facilities. It was thought this would be more efficient use of existing resources. The medical director indicated her concern would be that this would not be as predictable as the current deployment utilized by the ambulance contractor (system status management). That these random transports could fragment the system. The current system was established for a reason, and it works very well.

Committee member Knight indicated he was not proposing taking over the transport system, but to simply more effectively utilize the resources that are available today. It was noted that if the first-responders wanted to be a part of the transport component, that the ambulance contractor may want to be a part of the first responder component as well. The County representative indicated that the current focus of the medical director and the EMS system is medical treatment for the patient. It was noted that if fire departments were allowed to transport routinely because of their ability to do so, it could

encourage the building of capability. Currently, the system is exemplary in terms of patient care. There appears to be no need to alter the level of response or level dictated to go away from the medical need model.

The medical director indicated a physician provides medical direction on a 24 hour/7days a week basis for on-line medical control. This provides an avenue for approving fire-based transports when necessary; that it is a balance issue.

The Chair questioned whether the system expense is too high? The County representative indicated when both the user and tax-supported costs are lumped together it would seem expensive. It is important to note that the transport component is user paid, and it also pays for the Office of the Medical Director and some administration as a subsidy to the advalorem. Increasing the fire side of the equation would not lower costs because this is the advalorem supported part. Having an all-ALS level system costs more, but is worth it from the patient care perspective. It was noted that the EMS millage has reduced over the years, to 0.66 mills.

Committee member Knight indicated there would be no change in medical direction and that the county has approved funding for first-responder units. There would be no change in the system except to provide greater utilization of existing resources to improve service to the customer. The medical director noted that fire departments are not licensed as transport agencies. Committee member Knight indicated that the county is the agency that issues the Certificate of Need. It was indicated that the greater number of transport units, the greater the risk. Allowing first-responders to transport could create confusion in the system and would create pockets of coverage and fragmentation. Committee member Knight indicated that with the county's sophisticated radio system, there should be no confusion, just a question of which unit to use. There would be no financial impact because the contracts are set with both the first-responders and the ambulance contractor based upon a flat fee.

The Chair indicated he did not disagree with either point, however, this concept could ultimately reduce the availability and capability for firefighting. An example was given that if the fire department provided transport, it could triple their out-of-service time. This would be detrimental to fire service coverage unless additional revenues were received to increase capacity.

Committee member Foote questioned, why does a fire truck come in the first place? It was noted that the closest unit available provides EMS coverage, and that in some areas, it is cheaper and more effective to operate one ALS fire engine than two units (fire engine and a rescue). It was noted that firefighters are on duty 24/7 and that they are available to respond. More calls equals more productivity. The medical director indicated that the current system provides flexibility to meet patient needs. Committee member Foote questioned, would this ability of the fire department to transport get patients to a medical facility faster? The medical director responded that in those cases where a patient is in critical need, protocols are in place for the fire departments to transport now.

Committee member Knight indicated it is important to keep in mind that there are different response veracities for the first responders and the ambulance company.

(Seven minutes thirty seconds and ten minutes respectively). There was discussion about the length of time it takes to effect a transport. It was noted that first-responders are typically involved on scene approximately 30 minutes and that transports typically take approximately one hour.

Because of the time, the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: November 3, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Largo Training Center

Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – November 3, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Joe Calio, Sally Foote, Jerry Knight, Tim Schuler (Sally Israel, Kathleen Litton absent)

Staff: Gay Lancaster, (county representative), Jim Callahan (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe)

Others: Chuck Kearns, Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey (PC), Bob Siler, Jim Lanier, Louis Betz (AMR), John Little (PC Council of FFs), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), Rowland Herald (CL) Jay Stout (SH), Carroll Williams (LA)

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. The minutes of October 20 were approved unanimously.

Several handouts were provided at the beginning of the meeting.

- Letter from Fire Chief William Naylor, South Pasadena.
- REVISED, Fire Funding for Single Family Homes - Comparison from Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration. The previous handout was based upon proposed millages. The revised version is based upon actual FY 04 fire district millages.
- Survey for fire department personnel and fire apparatus resources.
- Email from Committee Member Sally Israel.
- First draft of policy recommendation #3 formulated by committee member Jerry Knight relative to fee assessment.

The committee reviewed the methodology of establishing the dependent fire district millages. And clarified that the fire protection agreements were funded based upon the percentage of property values of the unincorporated area compared to the percentage of the municipal area. For example, if the unincorporated area comprised 20 percent of the total property value, the unincorporated area would be taxed to generate 20 percent of the fire budget. Generally, when unincorporated properties are annexed, the property value is transferred from the unincorporated area to the municipal area. As the city's total property value increases, the unincorporated area's decreases, therefore the unincorporated area is responsible for a smaller percentage of the total budget, i.e., from 20 to 19 percent.

The one exception to this scenario is the High Point Fire District. As properties within High Point are annexed, the remaining unincorporated area continues to pay 100 percent of the costs related to fire protection services.

There was also discussion of the Tierra Verde Fire District. This area is currently assessed 1.32 mills and has a 1.5 mill cap. St. Petersburg has been requesting additional personnel to staff this station with a minimum of four personnel per day, but there is insufficient funds available to cover the additional cost for salaries because of the millage cap. In this case, it would be necessary to raise the fire millage cap through referendum.

There was also discussion of the Belleair/Belleair Bluffs Fire District. This is a unique area of the county. This fiscal year, the Town of Belleair began contracting with the City of Belleair Bluffs for fire protection. This fire contract specifies a certain percentage of the budget that Belleair pays. This percentage is not based upon property valuation.

It was questioned if an assessment fee structure would be a more equitable basis than utilizing property valuation. It was noted that in an assessment fee structure, everyone would pay the same. This would not necessarily cure all, but it would provide the ability to tap into exempt properties that are users but are not currently paying for fire protection services. This structure would help in terms of parity among users of the service.

There was discussion relative to the fee structure. If each taxing entity set their own fee structure, like properties would be paying different fees depending upon their taxing jurisdiction. This proposal would not set consistent fees countywide, but it would be equitable within each taxing district. This also would generate revenues from a new source (tax exempt properties).

The committee briefly discussed Committee Member Israel's email. It was the general consensus to defer further discussion of her comments until Ms. Israel's return.

It was questioned, what was the status of the County water plan? The committee had previously received the 5th draft of the water supply recommendation. The draft is at County Utilities for review and comment. Once completed, it would be taken to the County Commission for consideration. It was noted that the draft policy seems very strong and that it was heading in a good direction.

The fire department personnel and equipment survey was reviewed. It was noted that this information changes periodically based upon local needs. Several of the fire chiefs present provided updated information on the survey. These included Clearwater, Safety Harbor, Tarpon Springs and Palm Harbor.

A committee member questioned what was the total budget for the fire departments. Previous information provided noted that the total was approximately \$111 million for the fire departments and County fire administration.

The Committee reviewed the first draft of recommendation #3. The goal would be to establish and implement a fee schedule for fire protection countywide, providing for an exemption for governmental properties. It was suggested that the County could take a leadership role for the dependent districts and that the cities would be recommended to transition to a fee assessment process afterwards on a case-by-case basis. The County representative indicated if the county were to implement an assessment fee for all dependent fire districts, there could be some issues in determining how the fee should be allocated and paid. Currently, each dependent fire district pays a specified percentage amount of the city's fire department's budget based upon property value. Would it be appropriate to establish the amount due based upon property valuation and then assess those same properties based on some other criteria?

There was additional discussion about the assessment fee process, including what would happen if insufficient funding was collected, how would you determine the calculation and set the fees, and would the taxing authority be able to increase the assessment fee or would it have to go to the voters through a referendum each time.

One of the fire chiefs indicated the discussion on assessment fees for the unincorporated areas may not be viable in the long-term. It was indicated that through annexations and creation of independent fire districts, the dependent fire districts are shrinking. It was restated that the primary reason the committee is leaning towards fire assessments is to ensure that all that use the service pay for the service. Utilizing an estimate of 3 mills, the \$14 billion in tax exempt properties could generate an approximate \$42 million in new revenues. These revenues could be used to improve services (to reach an ISO Class 3), or could be used to reduce the financial burden of those that currently pay.

There was lengthy discussion relative to the county utilizing advalorem taxation for their portion of the fire budgets, while municipalities have several different revenue streams in addition to advalorem to generate their portion of the fire budget. By migrating to an assessment fee scenario, individuals in the municipalities may actually pay more because of these franchise fees. It was noted that if the expenses related to the fire department were removed from the general fund portion of the city budget, that a roll-back of the millage rate or franchise fees may be feasible. It was questioned if an incremental approach could be taken by carving out the capital improvement program and charging an assessment fee for that portion. It was indicated a blend of advalorem and assessment fees would be acceptable if they were applied uniformly.

It was noted that the potential of \$42 million of new revenues (by assessing tax-exempt properties) equates to approximately 37 percent of the total fire departments/County fire administration budget of \$111 million. The Chair noted that it was interesting that the two largest cities (Clearwater and St. Petersburg) had come close to implementing assessment fees, but decided to not go that way because of timing or political issues. The Committee consensus was to accept draft recommendation #3 on fire fees, with minor modifications (add that this was a strong recommendation of the committee, adding a clause for enhancing services based upon local standards and ISO, adding a clause for the feasibility of utilizing incremental implementation, and including an escalator clause). Committee member Knight indicated he would redraft Recommendation #3 based on the comments at today's meeting.

The Chair indicated there are three additional meetings scheduled (November 17, December 1, December 15) and asked what were the topics remaining to be discussed? Regionalization/consolidation/merger, formal action of recommendation #3, transport, formulate recommendations on sprinkler retrofit and water hydrants/infrastructure, and specialty team support.

There was a brief discussion about the current automatic aid agreement and the giving and receiving of aid. It was noted that the sharing of resources is lopsided sometimes. Some agencies give more than they get, while the smaller agencies are sharing everything they have. It was asked if it was feasible to recover costs when aid given versus aid received are not balanced. It was indicated the automatic agreement is a very fragile agreement and that it would probably not be desirable to open up the agreement for redefinition.

There was discussion on the sprinkler retrofit recommendation. It was suggested that the recommendation should have a broader focus of maintaining the integrity of the fire prevention code by not allowing the erosion or weakening of the code through legislative action.

There was discussion on the technical team support. It was noted that in addition to the technical rescue teams and the hazardous materials teams, that dive rescue was another specialty area that should be addressed. It was questioned, what constitutes water rescue. It was indicated that just because a department has a boat or some equipment, it does not necessarily mean they have a dive rescue program. It was suggested that a countywide program be defined prior to discussing a funding mechanism for funding what each department has. This program would need standard minimum criteria and define levels of participation before creating a funding process for firefighters in the water.

Next meeting: November 17, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Largo Training Center

**Pinellas Assembly Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes December 1, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center**

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Sally Foote, Tim Schuler (Sally Israel, Joe Calio, Jerry Knight, Kathleen Litton absent)

Staff: Gay Lancaster, (county representative), Carol Williams (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe) (Jim Callahan absent)

Others: Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Janice Metzger, Craig Hare (PC), Bob Siler, Jim Lanier (AMR), Dave Daiker (PC Council of FFs), Charles Dedman (EL Chair), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), William Naylor (S. PA), Kenneth Cramer (PP), Jim Large, Steven Smith (SP)

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. The minutes of November 3 were approved unanimously. It was noted that several members of the committee were absent, but it was decided to conduct an overview discussion of topics.

Several handouts were provided at the beginning of the meeting.

Letter from Fire Chief John Leahy, Pinellas Suncoast Independent Fire District.

Letter from Fire Chief James Angle, Palm Harbor Independent Fire District.

REVISED Personnel and Fire Apparatus Inventory Survey by Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration.

Email from Dwaine Booth relative to the proposed format for Pinellas Assembly.

Memorandum from Chair BCC and Chair Council of Mayors relative to the proposed time line and presentation meeting scheduled January 9, 2004.

The committee discussed the Pinellas Assembly time line and noted that it will be necessary to wrap up discussions and recommendations in the very near future to meet the completion goal of December 12. It was noted that the committee has scheduled today's meeting and a final meeting December 15. This would not meet the target time line. It was decided to schedule two additional meetings next week to complete the scope of work.

Pinellas County Fire/EMS Administration began reformatting the committee's tentative recommendations into the Pinellas Assembly format. This information will be reviewed with the chair at a scheduled meeting on December 2 and will be provided to all committee members for review in anticipation of the next scheduled meeting. Topics discussed to date include:

Cooperative purchasing
Fire Code
ISO
Water Infrastructure

Regionalization
Specialty Teams
Fire Fee
Transport

Tentative recommendations have been formulated on some of the topics, and the others will require additional discussion. Ms. Foote questioned whether the automatic aid issue should be discussed, specifically as it relates to contracting or bidding for fire protection services. It was generally thought that the committee would not be able to solve the issue of adequate staffing of districts. Without automatic aid, every jurisdiction would have to significantly increase staffing and resources. Utilizing automatic aid, there are sufficient resources to provide a high level of response within the county. The city representative indicated Ms. Foote's comments related to the discussion of last meeting, i.e., where fire departments are allowed to contract with another agency for fire protection even though they do not have sufficient resources to meet the contract. It was suggested that this could be included in the observations and findings of the report as a topic for further evaluation. The consolidation/regionalization topic may be an appropriate place to include this discussion.

There was discussion how the county fire service generally operates on a consolidated basis, i.e., training, communications, automatic aid, operating guidelines and that it should be endorsed and encouraged. It was suggested that the language could strongly recommend that executing fire protection contracts outside a jurisdiction's borders should consider the impact of closest unit dispatch. Examples include Kenneth City, Bay Pines, and Redington communities. It was questioned whether the Board of County Commissioners as the Fire Authority could impose or approve these contracts. County Fire/EMS Administration indicated the BCC is the fire authority for the entire county, to include establishing levels of services, fire codes, water supply, creation of fire protection districts, etc., and provides for a funding mechanism for unincorporated areas to pay for fire protection services. Generally, the county does intercede in local fire issues between jurisdictions, provided the specified levels of service are met. He also indicated there are fewer fire departments now than there were in the past, that the county encourages mergers, but plays no direct role in the process.

The chair indicated some cities are looking at NFPA 1710 staffing standards, but it is not universally adopted countywide. This may create a larger issue down the road with automatic aid. County Fire Protection Agreements require a minimum of three personnel on the first-due unit, and the first-due unit must meet a 7-1/2 minute response time standard 90 percent of the time.

The committee discussed the topic of consolidation. It was generally agreed that consolidation was unlikely to happen from a practical standpoint. That functional consolidation, even if not administrative consolidation, creates inequities and problems in millages and reciprocal issues. Consolidation could be a better scenario across the board for the citizens of Pinellas County. Even though it seems illogical, functional consolidation does seem to work well in Pinellas County. Automatic aid eliminates the need for all cities to staff for the maximum risk. It was noted that if consolidation were to occur, there may not be as many fire chiefs, but there'd probably be a lot more deputy chiefs.

There was general discussion relative to the cooperative purchasing concept and the recommendation to conduct an exploratory study on the feasibility and desirability of creating an insurance consortium for health, workers compensation and other insurance. It was stated that the fire departments routinely participate in cooperative purchasing.

There was general discussion relative to the fire fee and smoothing the unincorporated fire district millages. It was generally agreed that these are two separate issues, but they are complimentary in nature. It was desirable to tap into the \$18 million in non-taxable properties. It was also stated it may be desirable to support the leveling of the unincorporated dependent fire district millages, even though approximately half would pay more and half would pay less than the current taxing formula (current millages range from 1.5 to 3.36). It was thought this would not affect the current method for calculating the county's share of the respective fire district contracts, but would change the method for generating those dollars. It was questioned what type of action would be required to modify the taxing process, i.e., ordinance, referendum, etc.) This recommendation would only affect the dependent fire districts that are under Pinellas County's taxing authority. It would exclude the unincorporated areas within the independent fire districts (Palm Harbor, East Lake, Pinellas Suncoast, Lealman). It was stated that those jurisdictions could opt for the fire fee as the taxing authority. Pinellas Suncoast Fire District already utilizes the fire fee in lieu of advalorem taxation.

On the topic of fire fees, the committee supported the concept of generating offsetting or new revenues by assessing non-taxable properties. This concept would have to be approved separately by each taxing entity. If the fire fee was implemented, it would generate new revenues from previously non-taxable properties, that could in turn reduce the advalorem burden.

There was general discussion relative to specialty team funding. The county representative briefly reviewed some of the reformatted recommendations in the new format. These included information on the county's financial support of the hazardous materials (HM) and technical rescue teams (TRT). The county went on to give an overview of the wide range of water rescue services provided within the county.

It was stated that the county provides financial support to the six departments (St. Petersburg, Largo, Seminole, Pinellas Park HM and TRT, Clearwater - TRT, Palm Harbor - HM) that participate in HM and TRT teams. This financial support provides for operating, capital outlay and training. In addition, the county indirectly provides financial support for the personnel services through their prorated share of the fire protection contracts. It was generally agreed that the costs to support the specialty teams should be distributed countywide, that currently many cities and independent fire districts receive these services without contributing to the costs. The group also supported the concept of generating revenues through a surcharge or assessment to agencies that create the demand for the special response teams, i.e., hazardous materials carriers, etc.

On the topic of water rescue services, the county's position was that the scope of services are too varied and too undefined to support countywide funding at this time. It was recommended that additional study be conducted to define parameters for water rescue services prior to establishing any designated funding source.

On the topic of fire codes, the draft recommendation was to recommend the legislative delegation to support the appeal of the condominium fire sprinkler retrofit legislation, and to discourage amendments of the Florida Fire Prevention Code outside of the established process.

On the topic of water supply infrastructure, the draft recommendation was to support the county's efforts to standardize and implement minimum water supply and fire hydrant requirements. Previously, the task force was provided draft information on the county's water proposal. At the time, the information was in the Utilities department for review and input. Next, the proposal will go through the remaining review process and will go to the Board of County Commissioners as an ordinance. It is anticipated this process will take approximately two months to complete.

On the topic of the EMS component, there was general discussion on transport services. It was generally agreed that this topic may need further discussion prior to deciding whether a recommendation would be made or not. It appeared there was no consensus between the cities and the county on the issue of fire-based transport. The current transport system operates at a high level of patient care and that there are protocols in place to allow first responders (fire departments) to transport when necessary. The Chair inquired what was the county's contingency plan in the event the current transport contract was terminated. The county representative indicated there is a plan, and that the county would present the information at the next meeting.

The chair discussed the potential agenda for the next meeting. The focus would be to first finish the EMS discussion then discuss and amend the draft task force recommendations produced by the county.

Next meetings: December 9, 1:00 p.m., 315 Court Street, 6th Floor Conf. Room
 December 11, 3:00 p.m., 315 Court Street, 4th Floor Conf. Room

Pinellas Assembly – Fire/EMS Task Force
Meeting minutes – December 11, 2003, 3 pm
Largo Training Center

Present: Ed Hooper/ chair, Sally Foote, Tim Schuler , Sally Israel, Joe Calio, Jerry Knight, (Kathleen Litton absent)

Staff: Chuck Kearns (county representative), James Callahan (city representative), Cindy Goodson (scribe), (Gay Lancaster absent)

Others: Dwaine Booth, Mike Cooksey, Craig Hare (PC), Laurie Romig (OMD), Jim Lanier (AMR), Kevin Bowman (TS), James Angle (PH), Carroll Williams (LA), William Naylor (S. PA), Jay Stout (SH)

Mr. Hooper called the meeting to order. It was noted that the minutes of the December 9 meeting were not completed as yet for consideration. It was indicated this would most likely be the final meeting of the task force in order to meet the tentative deadline established for filing the task force's recommendations.

Handouts were provided at the beginning of the meeting:

- Revised Task Force Executive Summary Report dated December 9.
- Draft Task Force Implementation and Ramifications
- Letter from Chief Assistant County Administrator Gay Lancaster in response to discussions related to EMS transport on December 9.

The committee began reviewing the executive summary report that was essentially divided into four major categories of Savings, Service Improvement, Equitable Assignment of Costs and EMS Transport.

Findings and Facts: In the area of consolidation and/or regionalization, the committee added that it strongly supports voluntary regionalization efforts that would improve service and cost efficiencies. In the area of contracts for services as it relates to automatic aid, the committee added that the charges for such services should be appropriate rather than reflecting actual costs. This was in response to concerns that agencies could enter into contracts and be paid to provide fire protection services even though they would have to rely on automatic aid to provide the service.

In the area of Service Improvement, there was discussion about equipment compatibility. It was strongly felt that firefighting equipment should be interchangeable and compatible. It was noted that the self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) among the various departments is not compatible. It was noted by the fire chiefs that there are methods and procedures in place to minimize these concerns through the use of RIG (rapid rescue intervention) bags that provide a complete set of SCBA in the event a firefighter rescue is necessary at an emergency scene. There was further discussion on whether cooperative purchasing should be mandated or not. It was generally agreed that it would be difficult for the task force to mandate cooperative

purchasing, but that the implications and ramifications of not utilizing cooperative purchasing would result in not realizing maximum potential savings. In the area of insurance, the task force further defined the term non-traditional programs, to include insurance items as EAP, sick, disability, etc.

In the recommendation on ISO, the task force amended the section to be more clear and concise. It was generally agreed that the county, as the Fire Protection Authority, would be the appropriate agency to complete a feasibility study of improving the countywide ISO rating. The task force added language that specified no fire district's ISO classification should be reduced.

There was discussion on the Florida Fire Prevention Code. The final recommendation was that amendments should go through the established process rather than through legislative action.

There was discussion on water systems and minimum hydrant standards. This is primarily related to fire flow and hydrant spacing.

In the area of assignment of costs, there was significant discussion on the ad valorem adjustment for dependent fire districts and fire fees. It was generally agreed that implementing a fire fee on a countywide basis would be preferred, but at a minimum, that the dependent fire district millages should be equalized.

There was discussion on funding for specialty teams. It was generally agreed that an alternative funding source (surcharge or fee) should be developed to provide financial support for the hazardous materials and technical rescue teams. It was stated that the county is already providing some financial support for the specialty teams, but that the other non-participating fire departments utilize the services and are not providing any financial support.

The task force discussed the implementations and ramifications of the various recommendations.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the county representative discussed the procedures for finalizing the report. The redraft of the report will be emailed to the committee members for review and discussion. After conclusions are reached and a final draft is submitted, a form will be provided to each task force member to vote for or against each recommendation for the record.

Meeting adjourned 8:30 pm.

**Pinellas Assembly
EMS/Fire Task Force Report
Executive Summary
December 18, 2003**

Task Force Name **EMS / Fire Task Force**

Issue statement/Task Force Charge

Conduct a study of the fire services countywide to assess levels of services, cost, the distribution of cost and services, and related factors. The task force should evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable assignment of cost from consolidating districts, having cities serve parts of the unincorporated areas, and/or combining the city and county units into a single countywide fire protection system with uniform salary and benefit scales. If full consolidation is recommended, the task force should propose an approach and time-line for phasing it in. The task force should study EMS and evaluate whether cost might be lowered and/or performance improved by combining EMS with partially or fully consolidated fire protection services.

The Task Force Chair met with the City and County representatives on Friday, September 19, to outline the committee's future agenda to ensure completion by the target month of January. An agenda was distributed separating the task force mandate down into four major components:

- A. Savings (Consolidation and/or Regionalization, Joint Purchasing of Insurance and Other Commodities)
- B. Service Improvement (ISO Rating, Fire and Life Safety Codes, Hydrants and Infrastructure)
- C. Equitable Assignment of Costs (Fees, Tax Equity, Specialty Team Support)
- D. EMS Transport

Task Force Objectives

To provide integrated, high quality, efficient, and cost-effective fire protection and emergency medical services throughout Pinellas County by fairly compensated and well- trained personnel with due regard for the safety of the community and service providers through enactment and enforcement of uniform codes and paid for by as uniform a method of collection as possible by all consumers of services.

A. Savings

1. Consolidation and/or Regionalization - Evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable allocation of cost by consolidating districts, having cities serve parts of the unincorporated areas, and combining fire service agencies into a single countywide fire protection system with uniform salary and benefit scales. The task force should propose an approach and time-line to phase it in along with the recommendations presented.

2. Joint Purchasing of Insurance and Other Commodities - Assess the current purchasing programs.

B. Service Improvement

1. ISO - Consider how the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Division of Commercial Risk ratings for the fire services in Pinellas County can be improved.
2. Fire and Life Safety Codes - Review the State of Florida Legislature actions relative to Fire and Life Safety Codes and develop a strategy for seeing the needs of Pinellas County are appropriately addressed.
3. Fire Hydrants and Water System Standard – Consider a countywide minimum standard for the installation of fire hydrants, water mains and water available for firefighting.
4. Equipment Compatibility – Review policies and practices for improving equipment compatibility among fire services countywide.

C. Equitable Assignment of Costs: Study the fire services countywide and review levels and distribution of services, cost of services, the allocation of costs, and related factors including:

1. Fees – Evaluate the benefits of alternative fire funding sources.
2. Tax Equity – Evaluate the current funding methodologies to determine if costs are fairly spread over the properties and people receiving services.
3. Specialty Team Support – Review the composition, training, and funding for each of the Special Services Programs including, Hazmat, Technical Rescue and Marine/Water Rescue.

D. EMS Transport: Study EMS Transport and evaluate whether cost might be lowered and/or performance improved by partially or fully combining EMS Transport with fire services.

Task Force Members

Ed Hooper, Chairperson
Joe Calio
Sally Foote
Sally Israel
Jerry Knight
Kathleen Litton
Timothy Schuler

Staff Support

James Callahan, Fire Chief, City of St Petersburg Fire Rescue Department
Alternate: E. Carroll Williams, Fire Chief, City of Largo Fire Rescue Department

Findings and Facts

A. Savings

1. Consolidation and/or Regionalization - It was the consensus that, while additional discussion may be necessary, it seems there is no driving force for a recommendation at this time. As a result of the current 9-1-1 call center and dispatch system together with automatic aid and closest unit response regardless of the jurisdiction, Pinellas County Fire Services are already functionally consolidated, even though areas such as administration, finances, personnel and equipment may not be as efficient and equitable as they might be if partially or wholly consolidated.

It was stated that regionalization or reduction of the number of fire districts may make sense, but that current fire and EMS service contracts may make it a long-term endeavor. There have been some changes in the make-up, primarily due to annexations and contractual agreements in the Belleair/Belleair Bluffs area, Kenneth City, Redington Beaches, Tierra Verde, Gandy and High Point districts and through the creation of special independent fire districts since the last Charter Revision Commission reviewed EMS and fire services. It was generally thought that these consolidations could happen naturally over time, and that it is unlikely to occur or be successful through the application of pressure. The committee strongly supports voluntary regionalization efforts that would improve service and cost efficiencies.

The committee discussed service contracts and the potential of agencies entering into contractual agreements to provide services that relied on neighboring departments to fulfill them through automatic aid. It was recommended that the County Fire Authority review these contracts and ensure that each contracting agency has its own resources necessary to fulfill the contract requirements and that the charge for services is appropriate.

2. Joint Purchasing of Insurance and Other Commodities - The Task Force observed that the practice of joint purchasing for expendable supplies and commodities, uniforms, and equipment be supported and encouraged in the fire service Countywide. For example, the Florida Association of Counties, Florida Sheriffs Association, and Florida Fire Chiefs Association recently developed a cooperative program for the purchase of all fire apparatus, rescue vehicles, ambulances, and law enforcement vehicles. This is a very comprehensive and cost effective program that covers the full range of Public Safety vehicle requirements.

In addition, cost savings may be achieved by group purchasing of health insurance, workers compensation, and other similar benefits.

B. Service Improvement

1. ISO – The current ISO classifications for Pinellas County Fire Departments range from a Class 2 to a Class 5. There are many benefits that encourage an improved ISO rating and result in reduced fire insurance rates. Many improvements have been made since the last countywide study in 1990 and should contribute to a reduced ISO classification. Fire insurance rates are one of the significant overhead costs to businesses and manufacturing which might locate in Pinellas County. Any reduction in those fire insurance rates would be a benefit to locating a business in Pinellas County.

2. Fire and Life Safety Codes - During the 2003 session, the Florida State Legislature adopted Senate Bill 592, which exempted certain condominium unit owners from retrofitting their units with fire sprinkler systems. The current State Uniform Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes were adopted by the state a few years ago and both contain provisions for amending or modifying the codes without having to go back to the state legislature.

3. Fire Hydrants and Water System Standards - Currently the water systems in the county do not use the same standard for the location and minimum fire flow requirements for fire hydrants.

4. Equipment Compatibility – There is only some limited incompatibility of equipment used by the fire service in the County (i.e. breathing apparatus).

C. Equitable Assignment of Costs

1. Fees Equity – There is in excess of \$18 billion of property in Pinellas County that is tax-exempt. Although these properties impose proportionate service demands on fire service, they do not contribute any funding to support fire services.

2. Tax Equity – Property owners in the unincorporated, dependent Fire Districts are assessed at varying millage rates for the same level of services.

3. Specialty Team Support

Specialty teams are necessary for unique countywide hazardous materials and rescue incidents. Specialty teams are comprised from several, but not all, of the fire agencies. All communities benefit from the readiness of these resources to respond, but all do not contribute to funding each service.

Hazardous Materials Team (St. Pete, Largo, Seminole, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Park)

The County contributes \$117,650 annually towards funding training programs, physical exams, operating supplies, maintenance and capital equipment for the Hazardous Materials Team. In addition, four (4) of the five (5) vehicles assigned to the Hazardous Materials Team were purchased by the County and are included in the County's Vehicle Replacement Program at an annual cost of \$65,000.

Technical Rescue Team (St. Pete, Clearwater, Seminole, Pinellas Park, Largo)

The Technical Rescue Team receives approximately \$24,000 annually from the County for operating supplies and training programs. The County also purchased the four (4) vehicles assigned to its team.

Water/Marine Rescue (10 agencies with boats)

Pinellas County is surrounded on 3 sides with water and is dotted by numerous ponds, lakes and thousands of public and backyard swimming pools. Each of these bodies of water represents the potential for injury and death. Public safety agencies have a responsibility to respond to any type of emergency whether it is on land or the water and each uses various resources to serve its community. There is no countywide standard for water rescue response as there is for HAZMAT and Technical Rescue.

Water operations are divided into several categories and each requires a different type of response to mitigate the situation:

- Marine rescue for boaters in distress
- Marine search operations for lost boaters
- Search operations for lost swimmers
- Recovery operations for drowned swimmers
- Recovery operations for lost or stolen items and evidence investigations
- Swimming pool drowning incidents

The county Fire and EMS Authorities do not provide any direct funding for the water rescue programs but do pay firefighter and paramedic salary cost as part of the Fire District and EMS District contracts for services with the cities and independent fire districts.

D. EMS Transport –

The EMS Authority is empowered to assess up to 1.5 mills for Emergency Medical Services through a countywide ad valorem tax. Through strong financial controls, the EMS Authority has been able to keep the EMS tax rate the same or lower level in 8 of the last 10 years. The current millage rate is 0.68 and funds ALS First Responder Services countywide. Collections from ambulance services offset taxes by several million dollars each year and cover the full cost of the ALS ambulance contract and County EMS Administration. The current ambulance contract requires a minimum 10-minute response time to 90% of emergency calls in Pinellas County.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Savings

- **Conclusion A. 1. Consolidation and/or Regionalization Consensus Vote**
Agencies should be encouraged to continue cooperative efforts to provide effective and efficient services and, where possible, merge organizations where efficiencies and cost savings benefit the community.
 - **Recommendation A.1.**
The committee strongly supports voluntary regionalization efforts that improve service and cost efficiency. It is recommended that the County Fire Authority review contracts to ensure that each contracting agency has its own resources necessary to fulfill the contract requirements and that the charge for services is appropriate.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Fire Station List
 - Personnel List
 - Apparatus List
 - Current Millage Rates
 - Budget Documents
 - Fire District Maps
- **Implementation:**
 - There is no implementation schedule at this time.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - The Pinellas County Fire Protection and EMS System are considered to be world class. Opportunities for improved efficiency may not be realized.

Consensus Vote

- **Recommendation A.2.1**

- **Recommendation A.2.2**

- Florida Fire Chiefs State Purchasing Coop

- Maximum cost savings on equipment, materials and vehicles will not be realized

B. Service Improvement

- **Conclusion B.1 ISO**

Consensus Vote

An improved ISO rating Countywide may result in lower fire insurance rates primarily for commercial and, to a lesser extent, residential properties.

- **Recommendation B.1.1**

It is recommended that a consultant be hired by the County Fire Authority to review the property class status to determine if a countywide Class 3 rating can be obtained.

- **Recommendation B.1.2**

If it is recommended that a countywide Class 3 rating can be obtained, all jurisdictions would work to achieve this Class 3 rating goal

- **Recommendation B.1.3**

It would be a condition of a formal Countywide ISO study that any fire service jurisdiction currently with a three (3) rating or better would incur no reduction in their current status.

- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**

- Current ISO ratings for county departments
 - 1990 ISO Study
 - 1990 Automatic Aid Agreement

- **Implementation:**

- Hire a fire service consultant to review the ISO classification potential countywide.
 - Based on consultant recommendations, the Fire Protection Authority would pursue implementation.

- **Ramifications of No Action:**

- Homeowners and business owners will continue to pay higher costs for insurance premiums.

- **Conclusion B.2 Fire and Life Safety Codes Consensus Vote**
 In 2003, the Florida Legislature enacted Section 617.01041, F. S. that exempted certain high-rise condominium owners from retrofitting their buildings with fire sprinkler systems. The task force objects to legislation that would weaken State Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes as they relate to fire safety.
 - **Recommendation B.2.1**
 It is recommended that the Pinellas County legislative delegation prepare and support legislation which would restore the Fire Sprinkler Systems retrofit provision in the State Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes and require a phased-in full compliance by all high-rise residential occupancies over 75 feet in height.
 - **Recommendation B.2.2**
 It is also recommended that the Pinellas County legislative delegation be requested:
 - (A) to oppose legislation which would amend or change the State of Florida Building and Fire/Life Safety Codes, and
 - (B) to support sending notification of any future requested legislative changes to the appropriate Florida state code enforcement and/or oversight agency for review and consideration.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Section 617.01401, F.S. and SB-592.
- **Implementation:**
 - The local legislative delegation should be advised prior to the beginning of the 2004 legislative Session that there is a process in existence to address code changes. As an example, legislation was passed under Section 617.01401, F.S. to permit condominium residents to exempt themselves from retrofitting high-rise buildings with built-in fire protection systems.
 - The County Legislative liaison should be made aware of the pending legislation and oppose the item.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - If no action takes place it is possible that all or many of the older high-rise residential property owners will opt to exempt themselves from the retrofit requirements and over time injuries and fatalities to the residents and the firefighters who must respond to the fires will increase. As buildings age they become more susceptible to fire and thus are in need of built-in fire protection systems to assure the life safety of the occupants.
 - The failure to retrofit jeopardizes life safety and adversely affects ISO ratings and insurance costs and increases the cost of fire protection.
 - It is possible more legislation will be filed which may have the potential to continue to weaken the Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes. For example, it appears legislation will be filed again this coming year (2004), which will affect another portion of the retrofit requirements relating to balcony and hand railings.

- **Conclusion B.3 Fire Hydrants and Water System Standard Consensus Vote**
 There are numerous fire hydrant and water system standards throughout Pinellas County. Most cities have their own standards and the county has an internal hydrant policy. These standards and policies vary in many technical aspects.
 - **Recommendation B.3**
 It is recommended that a standard be developed and implemented countywide for the installation of fire hydrants and which establish the minimum water flow requirements necessary for firefighting operations.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Proposed amendment to the Pinellas County Code, Chapter 62, which establishes a minimum standard for installation of fire hydrants and available fire flow.
- **Implementation:**
 - Draft document was sent for the county's contract review on 11/24/03
 - Propose a public hearing to be scheduled prior to 3/1/04
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - If no action is taken there will be no consistent standard for spacing and installing fire hydrants and ensuring adequate fire flow.
 - Residents and property owners will be jeopardized by the lack of access to adequate water supply during fire events.

- **Conclusion B.4 Equipment Compatibility Consensus Vote**
All firefighting equipment should be compatible.
 - **Recommendation B.4**
It is recommended that all jurisdictions and fire officials work toward total compatibility of equipment countywide.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - There are no attachments.
- **Implementation**
 - Make recommendation to jurisdictions and Fire Officials.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - Some limited incompatibility of equipment will continue to exist.

C. Equitable Assignment of Costs

- **Conclusion C.1 Fees Consensus Vote**
There is in excess of \$18 Billion of property in Pinellas County that is tax-exempt. Although these properties impose proportionate service demands on fire service, they do not contribute any funding to support fire services.
 - **Recommendation C.1**
It is recommended that a countywide non-ad valorem assessment or fee, exempting only government and public educational facilities, be adopted as a funding alternative for fire services. Each jurisdiction should adopt the new funding method.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Sarasota County, City of Tallahassee and Pinellas Suncoast Fire Rescue District Fire Fee Schedules
- **Implementation:**
 - Hire a consultant to review potential for non-ad valorem assessment fee
 - Develop a countywide plan for review during FY 04/05
 - Determine which departments and municipalities will participate
 - Amend County Code 62 to reflect new funding mechanism
 - Implement assessment fee with FY 05/06
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - Current users and property owners that are exempt from existing property taxes will continue to use the service and place additional loads on the fire system without paying any of the cost.

▪ **Conclusion C.2 Tax Equity**

The current millage rates in the unincorporated dependent fire districts range from 1.299 to 3.608. Because of the countywide Automatic Aid Agreement and closest unit response system, all residents in the unincorporated area receive the same level of fire service.

○ **Recommendation C.2**

If the recommendation for a countywide non-ad valorem assessment or fee is not implemented as outlined in C.1., the committee recommends that a uniform millage rate or fee be adopted for the unincorporated dependent fire districts.

• **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**

- Current Millage Rates
- Budget Documents

• **Implementation:**

- Develop a plan for implementation of uniform millage or fee in the unincorporated area
- Determine new millage rate
- Amend County Code 62 to reflect new funding mechanism
- Implement during FY 05/06 budget

• **Ramifications of No Action:**

- Property owners in the unincorporated dependent districts will continue to be assessed unequal millage rates for the same level of fire service.

- **Conclusion C.3 Specialty Team Support Consensus Vote**
A funding mechanism should be implemented that provides funding to the departments that provide specialty team services to offset the cost of extraordinary overtime for training, equipment and other associated expenses. Marine and Water Rescue teams should be evaluated and coordinated on a countywide basis.
 - **Recommendation C.3.1**
It is recommended a plan be developed which utilizes the personnel, equipment and expertise of the public safety agencies within the county and establishes the minimum standards for participation and coordination of the marine and water rescue operations.
 - **Recommendation C.3.2**
It is recommended that the county establish a cost center within the General Fund Budget to provide Specialty Team training and equipment for members of the Hazmat, Technical Rescue, and Water Rescue teams.
 - **Recommendation C.3.3**
It is recommended that alternative funding sources and mechanisms be researched and considered for supporting the cost of Specialty Teams. For example, surcharges, fees, fines or assessments could be charged to chemical producers, commercial entities, and other beneficiaries of the specific rescue service.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - There are no attachments
- **Implementation:**
 - Prepare a budget in spring of 2004
 - Create a cost center in the County General Fund in spring of 2004
 - Implement new funding system in the FY 05/06 Budget
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - Emergency Management and Fire District funds would continue to underwrite portions of the cost of the Hazardous Materials Team and the Technical Rescue Team.
 - The lack of funding and uniform standards for a countywide Water Rescue program will continue to exist.

D. EMS Transport

- **Conclusion D. EMS Transport** **Consensus Vote**
The EMS Authority should continue to strive for the highest quality Advanced Life Support (ALS) Ambulance Services at the most reasonable cost.
- **Recommendation D.1**
The task force recommends that representatives of stakeholders (Fire Chiefs' Association, AMR, EMS Authority Staff, Office of the Medical Director) discuss the EMS Transport system concerning possible improvements of service.
 - A. All interested parties shall be afforded an opportunity to present their views to this review committee.
 - B. The review committee shall conduct their discussions within calendar year 2004.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - There are no attachments
- **Implementation:**
 - Any change in the EMS System should be carefully evaluated and methodically implemented by the EMS Authority. Representatives of stakeholders (Fire Chiefs' Association, AMR, EMS Authority Staff, Office of the Medical Director) shall meet in 2004 to discuss possible improvements of service in the EMS Transport system.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - An opportunity for improvement to our existing high quality EMS System may be missed.

**Pinellas Assembly
EMS/Fire Task Force Report
Executive Summary
December 18, 2003**

Task Force Name **EMS / Fire Task Force**

Issue statement/Task Force Charge

Conduct a study of the fire services countywide to assess levels of services, cost, the distribution of cost and services, and related factors. The task force should evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable assignment of cost from consolidating districts, having cities serve parts of the unincorporated areas, and/or combining the city and county units into a single countywide fire protection system with uniform salary and benefit scales. If full consolidation is recommended, the task force should propose an approach and time-line for phasing it in. The task force should study EMS and evaluate whether cost might be lowered and/or performance improved by combining EMS with partially or fully consolidated fire protection services.

The Task Force Chair met with the City and County representatives on Friday, September 19, to outline the committee's future agenda to ensure completion by the target month of January. An agenda was distributed separating the task force mandate down into four major components:

- A. Savings (Consolidation and/or Regionalization, Joint Purchasing of Insurance and Other Commodities)
- B. Service Improvement (ISO Rating, Fire and Life Safety Codes, Hydrants and Infrastructure)
- C. Equitable Assignment of Costs (Fees, Tax Equity, Specialty Team Support)
- D. EMS Transport

Task Force Objectives

To provide integrated, high quality, efficient, and cost-effective fire protection and emergency medical services throughout Pinellas County by fairly compensated and well- trained personnel with due regard for the safety of the community and service providers through enactment and enforcement of uniform codes and paid for by as uniform a method of collection as possible by all consumers of services.

A. Savings

1. Consolidation and/or Regionalization - Evaluate the potential for savings, improved services, and more equitable allocation of cost by consolidating districts, having cities serve parts of the unincorporated areas, and combining fire service agencies into a single countywide fire protection system with uniform salary and benefit scales. The task force should propose an approach and time-line to phase it in along with the recommendations presented.

2. Joint Purchasing of Insurance and Other Commodities - Assess the current purchasing programs.

B. Service Improvement

1. ISO - Consider how the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Division of Commercial Risk ratings for the fire services in Pinellas County can be improved.
2. Fire and Life Safety Codes - Review the State of Florida Legislature actions relative to Fire and Life Safety Codes and develop a strategy for seeing the needs of Pinellas County are appropriately addressed.
3. Fire Hydrants and Water System Standard – Consider a countywide minimum standard for the installation of fire hydrants, water mains and water available for firefighting.
4. Equipment Compatibility – Review policies and practices for improving equipment compatibility among fire services countywide.

C. Equitable Assignment of Costs: Study the fire services countywide and review levels and distribution of services, cost of services, the allocation of costs, and related factors including:

1. Fees – Evaluate the benefits of alternative fire funding sources.
2. Tax Equity – Evaluate the current funding methodologies to determine if costs are fairly spread over the properties and people receiving services.
3. Specialty Team Support – Review the composition, training, and funding for each of the Special Services Programs including, Hazmat, Technical Rescue and Marine/Water Rescue.

D. EMS Transport: Study EMS Transport and evaluate whether cost might be lowered and/or performance improved by partially or fully combining EMS Transport with fire services.

Task Force Members

Ed Hooper, Chairperson
Joe Calio
Sally Foote
Sally Israel
Jerry Knight
Kathleen Litton
Timothy Schuler

Staff Support

James Callahan, Fire Chief, City of St Petersburg Fire Rescue Department
Alternate: E. Carroll Williams, Fire Chief, City of Largo Fire Rescue Department

Findings and Facts

A. Savings

1. Consolidation and/or Regionalization - It was the consensus that, while additional discussion may be necessary, it seems there is no driving force for a recommendation at this time. As a result of the current 9-1-1 call center and dispatch system together with automatic aid and closest unit response regardless of the jurisdiction, Pinellas County Fire Services are already functionally consolidated, even though areas such as administration, finances, personnel and equipment may not be as efficient and equitable as they might be if partially or wholly consolidated.

It was stated that regionalization or reduction of the number of fire districts may make sense, but that current fire and EMS service contracts may make it a long-term endeavor. There have been some changes in the make-up, primarily due to annexations and contractual agreements in the Belleair/Belleair Bluffs area, Kenneth City, Redington Beaches, Tierra Verde, Gandy and High Point districts and through the creation of special independent fire districts since the last Charter Revision Commission reviewed EMS and fire services. It was generally thought that these consolidations could happen naturally over time, and that it is unlikely to occur or be successful through the application of pressure. The committee strongly supports voluntary regionalization efforts that would improve service and cost efficiencies.

The committee discussed service contracts and the potential of agencies entering into contractual agreements to provide services that relied on neighboring departments to fulfill them through automatic aid. It was recommended that the County Fire Authority review these contracts and ensure that each contracting agency has its own resources necessary to fulfill the contract requirements and that the charge for services is appropriate.

2. Joint Purchasing of Insurance and Other Commodities - The Task Force observed that the practice of joint purchasing for expendable supplies and commodities, uniforms, and equipment be supported and encouraged in the fire service Countywide. For example, the Florida Association of Counties, Florida Sheriffs Association, and Florida Fire Chiefs Association recently developed a cooperative program for the purchase of all fire apparatus, rescue vehicles, ambulances, and law enforcement vehicles. This is a very comprehensive and cost effective program that covers the full range of Public Safety vehicle requirements.

In addition, cost savings may be achieved by group purchasing of health insurance, workers compensation, and other similar benefits.

B. Service Improvement

1. ISO – The current ISO classifications for Pinellas County Fire Departments range from a Class 2 to a Class 5. There are many benefits that encourage an improved ISO rating and result in reduced fire insurance rates. Many improvements have been made since the last countywide study in 1990 and should contribute to a reduced ISO classification. Fire insurance rates are one of the significant overhead costs to businesses and manufacturing which might locate in Pinellas County. Any reduction in those fire insurance rates would be a benefit to locating a business in Pinellas County.

2. Fire and Life Safety Codes - During the 2003 session, the Florida State Legislature adopted Senate Bill 592, which exempted certain condominium unit owners from retrofitting their units with fire sprinkler systems. The current State Uniform Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes were adopted by the state a few years ago and both contain provisions for amending or modifying the codes without having to go back to the state legislature.

3. Fire Hydrants and Water System Standards - Currently the water systems in the county do not use the same standard for the location and minimum fire flow requirements for fire hydrants.

4. Equipment Compatibility – There is only some limited incompatibility of equipment used by the fire service in the County (i.e. breathing apparatus).

C. Equitable Assignment of Costs

1. Fees Equity – There is in excess of \$18 billion of property in Pinellas County that is tax-exempt. Although these properties impose proportionate service demands on fire service, they do not contribute any funding to support fire services.

2. Tax Equity – Property owners in the unincorporated, dependent Fire Districts are assessed at varying millage rates for the same level of services.

3. Specialty Team Support

Specialty teams are necessary for unique countywide hazardous materials and rescue incidents. Specialty teams are comprised from several, but not all, of the fire agencies. All communities benefit from the readiness of these resources to respond, but all do not contribute to funding each service.

Hazardous Materials Team (St. Pete, Largo, Seminole, Palm Harbor, Pinellas Park)

The County contributes \$117,650 annually towards funding training programs, physical exams, operating supplies, maintenance and capital equipment for the Hazardous Materials Team. In addition, four (4) of the five (5) vehicles assigned to the Hazardous Materials Team were purchased by the County and are included in the County's Vehicle Replacement Program at an annual cost of \$65,000.

Technical Rescue Team (St. Pete, Clearwater, Seminole, Pinellas Park, Largo)

The Technical Rescue Team receives approximately \$24,000 annually from the County for operating supplies and training programs. The County also purchased the four (4) vehicles assigned to its team.

Water/Marine Rescue (10 agencies with boats)

Pinellas County is surrounded on 3 sides with water and is dotted by numerous ponds, lakes and thousands of public and backyard swimming pools. Each of these bodies of water represents the potential for injury and death. Public safety agencies have a responsibility to respond to any type of emergency whether it is on land or the water and each uses various resources to serve its community. There is no countywide standard for water rescue response as there is for HAZMAT and Technical Rescue.

Water operations are divided into several categories and each requires a different type of response to mitigate the situation:

- Marine rescue for boaters in distress
- Marine search operations for lost boaters
- Search operations for lost swimmers
- Recovery operations for drowned swimmers
- Recovery operations for lost or stolen items and evidence investigations
- Swimming pool drowning incidents

The county Fire and EMS Authorities do not provide any direct funding for the water rescue programs but do pay firefighter and paramedic salary cost as part of the Fire District and EMS District contracts for services with the cities and independent fire districts.

D. EMS Transport –

The EMS Authority is empowered to assess up to 1.5 mills for Emergency Medical Services through a countywide ad valorem tax. Through strong financial controls, the EMS Authority has been able to keep the EMS tax rate the same or lower level in 8 of the last 10 years. The current millage rate is 0.68 and funds ALS First Responder Services countywide. Collections from ambulance services offset taxes by several million dollars each year and cover the full cost of the ALS ambulance contract and County EMS Administration. The current ambulance contract requires a minimum 10-minute response time to 90% of emergency calls in Pinellas County.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Savings

- **Conclusion A. 1. Consolidation and/or Regionalization Consensus Vote**
Agencies should be encouraged to continue cooperative efforts to provide effective and efficient services and, where possible, merge organizations where efficiencies and cost savings benefit the community.
 - **Recommendation A.1.**
The committee strongly supports voluntary regionalization efforts that improve service and cost efficiency. It is recommended that the County Fire Authority review contracts to ensure that each contracting agency has its own resources necessary to fulfill the contract requirements and that the charge for services is appropriate.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Fire Station List
 - Personnel List
 - Apparatus List
 - Current Millage Rates
 - Budget Documents
 - Fire District Maps
- **Implementation:**
 - There is no implementation schedule at this time.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - The Pinellas County Fire Protection and EMS System are considered to be world class. Opportunities for improved efficiency may not be realized.

- **Conclusion A.2 Joint Purchasing Consensus Vote**
 Past experience has shown that there are cost savings when multiple agencies can purchase larger quantities using the same specifications.
 - **Recommendation A.2.1**
 It is recommended that the practice of joint purchasing for expendable supplies and commodities, uniforms and equipment be supported and encouraged in the fire service Countywide.
 - **Recommendation A.2.2**
 It is further recommended that a consortium of city and independent fire district risk managers, personnel directors and purchasing directors participate in an exploratory study to determine if savings could be achieved by jointly purchasing workers compensation insurance, employee healthcare benefits and other programs and benefits where joint negotiations and procurement would result in cost reductions.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Florida Fire Chiefs State Purchasing Coop
[http://www.flsheriffs.org/03-04-0828 Bid Award.pdf](http://www.flsheriffs.org/03-04-0828%20Bid%20Award.pdf)
- **Implementation:**
 - Utilize members of the Fire Chief's Purchasing Committee and local Purchasing Directors to prepare an operating proposal for a countywide fire purchasing cooperative.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - A countywide system is an opportunity for controlling costs to all users and guaranteeing long-term best prices.
 - Maximum cost savings on equipment, materials and vehicles will not be realized

B. Service Improvement

- **Conclusion B.1 ISO**

Consensus Vote

An improved ISO rating Countywide may result in lower fire insurance rates primarily for commercial and, to a lesser extent, residential properties.

- **Recommendation B.1.1**

It is recommended that a consultant be hired by the County Fire Authority to review the property class status to determine if a countywide Class 3 rating can be obtained.

- **Recommendation B.1.2**

If it is recommended that a countywide Class 3 rating can be obtained, all jurisdictions would work to achieve this Class 3 rating goal

- **Recommendation B.1.3**

It would be a condition of a formal Countywide ISO study that any fire service jurisdiction currently with a three (3) rating or better would incur no reduction in their current status.

- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**

- Current ISO ratings for county departments
 - 1990 ISO Study
 - 1990 Automatic Aid Agreement

- **Implementation:**

- Hire a fire service consultant to review the ISO classification potential countywide.
 - Based on consultant recommendations, the Fire Protection Authority would pursue implementation.

- **Ramifications of No Action:**

- Homeowners and business owners will continue to pay higher costs for insurance premiums.

- **Conclusion B.2 Fire and Life Safety Codes Consensus Vote**
 In 2003, the Florida Legislature enacted Section 617.01041, F. S. that exempted certain high-rise condominium owners from retrofitting their buildings with fire sprinkler systems. The task force objects to legislation that would weaken State Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes as they relate to fire safety.
 - **Recommendation B.2.1**
 It is recommended that the Pinellas County legislative delegation prepare and support legislation which would restore the Fire Sprinkler Systems retrofit provision in the State Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes and require a phased-in full compliance by all high-rise residential occupancies over 75 feet in height.
 - **Recommendation B.2.2**
 It is also recommended that the Pinellas County legislative delegation be requested:
 - (A) to oppose legislation which would amend or change the State of Florida Building and Fire/Life Safety Codes, and
 - (B) to support sending notification of any future requested legislative changes to the appropriate Florida state code enforcement and/or oversight agency for review and consideration.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Section 617.01401, F.S. and SB-592.
- **Implementation:**
 - The local legislative delegation should be advised prior to the beginning of the 2004 legislative Session that there is a process in existence to address code changes. As an example, legislation was passed under Section 617.01401, F.S. to permit condominium residents to exempt themselves from retrofitting high-rise buildings with built-in fire protection systems.
 - The County Legislative liaison should be made aware of the pending legislation and oppose the item.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - If no action takes place it is possible that all or many of the older high-rise residential property owners will opt to exempt themselves from the retrofit requirements and over time injuries and fatalities to the residents and the firefighters who must respond to the fires will increase. As buildings age they become more susceptible to fire and thus are in need of built-in fire protection systems to assure the life safety of the occupants.
 - The failure to retrofit jeopardizes life safety and adversely affects ISO ratings and insurance costs and increases the cost of fire protection.
 - It is possible more legislation will be filed which may have the potential to continue to weaken the Building and Fire / Life Safety Codes. For example, it appears legislation will be filed again this coming year (2004), which will affect another portion of the retrofit requirements relating to balcony and hand railings.

- **Conclusion B.3 Fire Hydrants and Water System Standard Consensus Vote**
 There are numerous fire hydrant and water system standards throughout Pinellas County. Most cities have their own standards and the county has an internal hydrant policy. These standards and policies vary in many technical aspects.
 - **Recommendation B.3**
 It is recommended that a standard be developed and implemented countywide for the installation of fire hydrants and which establish the minimum water flow requirements necessary for firefighting operations.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Proposed amendment to the Pinellas County Code, Chapter 62, which establishes a minimum standard for installation of fire hydrants and available fire flow.
- **Implementation:**
 - Draft document was sent for the county's contract review on 11/24/03
 - Propose a public hearing to be scheduled prior to 3/1/04
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - If no action is taken there will be no consistent standard for spacing and installing fire hydrants and ensuring adequate fire flow.
 - Residents and property owners will be jeopardized by the lack of access to adequate water supply during fire events.

- **Conclusion B.4 Equipment Compatibility Consensus Vote**
All firefighting equipment should be compatible.
 - **Recommendation B.4**
It is recommended that all jurisdictions and fire officials work toward total compatibility of equipment countywide.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - There are no attachments.
- **Implementation**
 - Make recommendation to jurisdictions and Fire Officials.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - Some limited incompatibility of equipment will continue to exist.

C. Equitable Assignment of Costs

- **Conclusion C.1 Fees Consensus Vote**
There is in excess of \$18 Billion of property in Pinellas County that is tax-exempt. Although these properties impose proportionate service demands on fire service, they do not contribute any funding to support fire services.
 - **Recommendation C.1**
It is recommended that a countywide non-ad valorem assessment or fee, exempting only government and public educational facilities, be adopted as a funding alternative for fire services. Each jurisdiction should adopt the new funding method.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - Sarasota County, City of Tallahassee and Pinellas Suncoast Fire Rescue District Fire Fee Schedules
- **Implementation:**
 - Hire a consultant to review potential for non-ad valorem assessment fee
 - Develop a countywide plan for review during FY 04/05
 - Determine which departments and municipalities will participate
 - Amend County Code 62 to reflect new funding mechanism
 - Implement assessment fee with FY 05/06
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - Current users and property owners that are exempt from existing property taxes will continue to use the service and place additional loads on the fire system without paying any of the cost.

▪ **Conclusion C.2 Tax Equity**

The current millage rates in the unincorporated dependent fire districts range from 1.299 to 3.608. Because of the countywide Automatic Aid Agreement and closest unit response system, all residents in the unincorporated area receive the same level of fire service.

○ **Recommendation C.2**

If the recommendation for a countywide non-ad valorem assessment or fee is not implemented as outlined in C.1., the committee recommends that a uniform millage rate or fee be adopted for the unincorporated dependent fire districts.

• **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**

- Current Millage Rates
- Budget Documents

• **Implementation:**

- Develop a plan for implementation of uniform millage or fee in the unincorporated area
- Determine new millage rate
- Amend County Code 62 to reflect new funding mechanism
- Implement during FY 05/06 budget

• **Ramifications of No Action:**

- Property owners in the unincorporated dependent districts will continue to be assessed unequal millage rates for the same level of fire service.

- **Conclusion C.3 Specialty Team Support Consensus Vote**
A funding mechanism should be implemented that provides funding to the departments that provide specialty team services to offset the cost of extraordinary overtime for training, equipment and other associated expenses. Marine and Water Rescue teams should be evaluated and coordinated on a countywide basis.
 - **Recommendation C.3.1**
It is recommended a plan be developed which utilizes the personnel, equipment and expertise of the public safety agencies within the county and establishes the minimum standards for participation and coordination of the marine and water rescue operations.
 - **Recommendation C.3.2**
It is recommended that the county establish a cost center within the General Fund Budget to provide Specialty Team training and equipment for members of the Hazmat, Technical Rescue, and Water Rescue teams.
 - **Recommendation C.3.3**
It is recommended that alternative funding sources and mechanisms be researched and considered for supporting the cost of Specialty Teams. For example, surcharges, fees, fines or assessments could be charged to chemical producers, commercial entities, and other beneficiaries of the specific rescue service.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - There are no attachments
- **Implementation:**
 - Prepare a budget in spring of 2004
 - Create a cost center in the County General Fund in spring of 2004
 - Implement new funding system in the FY 05/06 Budget
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - Emergency Management and Fire District funds would continue to underwrite portions of the cost of the Hazardous Materials Team and the Technical Rescue Team.
 - The lack of funding and uniform standards for a countywide Water Rescue program will continue to exist.

D. EMS Transport

- **Conclusion D. EMS Transport** **Consensus Vote**
The EMS Authority should continue to strive for the highest quality Advanced Life Support (ALS) Ambulance Services at the most reasonable cost.
- **Recommendation D.1**
The task force recommends that representatives of stakeholders (Fire Chiefs' Association, AMR, EMS Authority Staff, Office of the Medical Director) discuss the EMS Transport system concerning possible improvements of service.
 - A. All interested parties shall be afforded an opportunity to present their views to this review committee.
 - B. The review committee shall conduct their discussions within calendar year 2004.
- **Indicate if there are attachments of background data.**
 - There are no attachments
- **Implementation:**
 - Any change in the EMS System should be carefully evaluated and methodically implemented by the EMS Authority. Representatives of stakeholders (Fire Chiefs' Association, AMR, EMS Authority Staff, Office of the Medical Director) shall meet in 2004 to discuss possible improvements of service in the EMS Transport system.
- **Ramifications of No Action:**
 - An opportunity for improvement to our existing high quality EMS System may be missed.