

Four Pinellas County fire districts form council

By [Eric Horchy](#)



FILE PHOTO

The East Lake Tarpon Special Fire Control District has joined three other Pinellas district, including Palm Harbor, in a collaborative arrangement under the banner of the Council of Special Fire Districts of Pinellas.

Four independent special fire districts in Pinellas County recently entered into an interlocal agreement in an effort to better collaborate while serving area residents.

The districts involved are the East Lake Tarpon Special Fire Control District, Lealman Special Fire Control District, Palm Harbor Special Fire Control and Rescue District and Pinellas Suncoast Fire and Rescue District, in Indian Rocks.

The agreement creating the Council of Special Fire Districts of Pinellas was a response to the various fire and emergency medical services issues within the county, according to a press release from Lealman Fire District.

County officials angered many city and community fire departments by proposing, as a cost-saving measure, an end to having a fire truck responded along with a county Sunstar ambulance on what are deemed low-priority emergency medical calls.

Forming the council "makes sense," Lealman Fire District Capt. Jim Millican said Monday. "The districts all have many things in common, so in order to work on common issues together it makes sense to join forces in this manner."

Special fire districts are governed by a fire commission elected by the residents of each district. Palm Harbor Fire Commissioner Norm Atherton said creating this newly formed council has been a goal for some time.

"Over the years I have witnessed the four fire districts working with local and state officials independently on issues of common interest," he was quoted in the press release. "It was my goal with this council to allow us to work on these issues collectively."

The four fire districts provide fire protection, EMS, hazardous materials, marine rescue and disaster response to a population of 158,120 residents. That range covers spans from East Lake and Palm Harbor in the north, mid-county areas of Belleair Beach, Belleair Shore, Indian Rocks Beach and Indian Shores, and south to St. Petersburg.

East Lake Fire Commissioner Tom McKone said in the release the council will provide a "unified voice" for the four independent fire districts at the local, state and federal level.

The council itself will have one representative from each district.

A specific meeting schedule has not been disclosed, but the four representatives will discuss issues of sponsoring, opposing or supporting legislation, rules, ordinances and resolutions that could potentially impact the fire districts.