

DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT

DIVE TEAM

A Deeper Dive

The PCSO is always "Leading The Way For A Safer Pinellas" – and that doesn't stop at the shoreline.

When the Sheriff's Office suspects one of the county's many bodies of water is the location of missing vehicles, articles, evidence, or persons, the PCSO Dive Team is called to scour the area.

The Dive Team is composed of 10 SCUBA-certified members who must complete several challenging practical skills tests in the water to earn a place on the team and train monthly to stay abreast of equipment and techniques and practice realistic potential scenarios.

When it comes to call-outs, the team doesn't just dive right in. Living in an area not only surrounded by water but also sprinkled with freshwater lakes, tributaries, and canals, planning the logistics is one of the most important, yet challenging aspects of the position.

"We have the equipment to handle just about anything," said **Assistant Team Leader Corporal Charlie Tita**, "but planning and flexibility are vital to the success of every one of our missions."

Most recently, the team acquired a new side scan sonar with new, vastly improved technology that makes it much easier to use.



As the only law enforcement dive team in Pinellas aside from the one at Tarpon Springs Police Department, the team works very closely with both PCSO departments and other local agencies.

Sometimes, the call-outs aren't even what most people would call local, like recently, when PCSO homicide detectives requested assistance searching a large body of water in Citrus County for evidence related to a crime committed in Pinellas.

Although call-out locations and frequency are as varied as any law enforcement case, the physical and psychological demands are consistent.

"Public safety diving is one of the most dangerous jobs in law enforcement, and there is a high risk of injury or death to divers," **Corporal Tita** said.

At the mercy of the wind and weather, divers are often faced with hazardous conditions and contaminated environments. But true to their deputy vocations – putting their lives in danger every day – the risk is worth the reward.

"The challenge, camaraderie, and feeling upon a successful outcome make it very rewarding."