



VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF FIRST RESPONDERS

STRONGER TOGETHER. ALWAYS READY

NEWS FROM THE TRAINING DIVISION – NOVEMBER 15, 2025

Big News for 2026: Rescue College Becomes the *Virginia First Responder Symposium!*

As part of the organization's transformation from the Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads (VAVRS) to the Virginia Association of First Responders (VAFR), we are proud to announce that Rescue College has officially been renamed the Virginia First Responder Symposium.

This name change represents the evolution of public safety in Virginia. What began 51 years ago as a primarily EMS-focused training event has grown into a statewide, multi-disciplinary program serving Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement, Technical Rescue, Telecommunications, Chaplaincy, Leadership, and Mental Health professionals. The new name reflects our broadened mission and the unified identity of today's first responder community.

The Virginia First Responder Symposium will be held June 12–21, 2026, in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Major Funding Announced for the 2026 Symposium

VAFR is thrilled to share several major funding awards that will directly support attendance at the 2026 Virginia First Responder Symposium.

VAFR has received a \$40,000 grant from the Walton and Ada Thompson Charitable Foundation. Special thanks to Bubby Bish (Executive Director) and Steve Grayson (Past President) for their detailed work preparing and securing this grant. This funding will cover the cost of registration for the first 400 VAFR members registered for the Symposium.

Non-members will pay \$100, which will make them an Individual Member of VAFR and provide full access to the event.

In addition, thanks once again to Bubby Bish (Executive Director), VAFR has received \$35,000 from various Moose Lodges across Virginia in continued support of Rescue College and its transition into the expanded Symposium model. Their generosity helps us offer high-quality, affordable training to responders across the Commonwealth.

VAFR Invited to Teach at the Tidewater EMS Expo

Chris Craft (Training Officer) has received a formal invitation from the Tidewater EMS Expo to present VAFR courses at their upcoming Tidewater EMS Expo. Members interested in instructing or assisting should contact Chris Craft for more information.



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Eight Training Tracks for 2026 – Including New Public Safety Chaplaincy Track

The 2026 Symposium will feature eight comprehensive training tracks tailored to the diverse needs of Virginia's first responder community:

- EMS
- Fire & Hazmat (NEW!)
- Law Enforcement (NEW!)
- Technical Rescue
- Leadership & Administration
- Mental Health & Resilience
- Telecommunications (NEW!)
- Public Safety Chaplaincy (NEW!)

These expanded tracks reflect our commitment to serving the full spectrum of public safety disciplines across the Commonwealth. Each track is being built with input from subject matter experts to ensure high-quality, relevant, and scenario-driven education that supports both new and experienced providers.

Virginia Office of EMS to Deliver Dedicated Pediatric Track

Michael Berg with the Virginia Office of EMS will lead a full Pediatric Track during the Symposium, supported by the federally funded EMS for Children (EMSC) program.

EMSC is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and the Maternal Child Health Bureau. The program focuses on:

- Pediatric emergency care training
- Childhood injury and illness prevention
- School health initiatives
- EMS and hospital preparedness
- Pediatric data improvement

Since its inception in 1984, EMSC's national work has contributed to a 40% decline in pediatric patient deaths. Incorporating this program into the Symposium will strengthen pediatric care across the Commonwealth.



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TRAINING DIVISION SNAPSHOT 2025

January 2025 - November 2025



326

Total Courses



2,519

Participants



EVOC

234



Swift Water

9



Rope Rescue

9



Traffic Management

9



Extrication

29



Infection Control

20



Off Road Operations

7



Search & Rescue

2



Instructor & Management

6

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