

# Abstracts of Oral Presentations-WADEM Congress on Disaster and Emergency Medicine 2019

## CLIMATE CHANGE

### **Rising Sea Level and the Growing Threat of Hazardous Material Releases: A Pilot Project in Coastal Virginia**

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**Introduction:** Hazardous materials are widely used in modern society, including in industry, business, agriculture, research, healthcare, and other sectors. As sea levels continue to rise around the globe, locations where hazardous materials are produced, stored, transported, or utilized become increasingly vulnerable to flooding, storm surge, and other problems that can result in accidental releases. Such releases can pose threats to health, the environment, and the economic viability of communities.

**Aim:** This paper reports on a new pilot project in Coastal Virginia to increase awareness, enhance safeguards, and strengthen preparedness for the growing threat of hazardous material releases posed by rising sea levels.

**Methods:** Launched under the Institute for Coastal Adaptation and Resilience (ICAR) at Old Dominion University, with support from the ODU Resilience Collaborative, the

project includes several components. One part identifies hazardous materials sectors that could be affected by rising seas. Another component consists of case studies of locations that have already been affected. A third component involves stakeholder workshops where participants work collaboratively to enhance safeguards and strengthen preparedness.

**Results:** Designed in 2017 and 2018, the project secured initial funding early in 2018. Since then, the project has worked to identify sectors and activities that could be affected by rising seas and establish links with key stakeholder agencies, sectors, and organizations. The next steps, to be completed in 2019, involve preparation of case studies from facilities already affected by rising sea levels, and the implementation of the first in a series of stakeholder workshops.

**Discussion:** As sea levels rise, more hazardous materials locations become vulnerable. Proactively addressing this threat is an essential part of sea level rise preparedness, adaptation, and resilience. The new pilot project in Coastal Virginia is intended to help address this challenge by increasing awareness and bringing stakeholders together to collaboratively identify practical steps forward.

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