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Public Affairs & News Bureau, Old Dominion University

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# Public Schools Ask to Join ODU-Led Sea Level Rise Pilot Project



Ray Toll

Halfway through the two-year pilot project led by Old Dominion University to help the region mitigate and adapt to sea level rise, the initiative has attracted an important new participant.

The region's public school superintendents contacted the pilot project organizers and met this week at WHRO studios on Hampton Boulevard.

After the mission of the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Pilot Project was explained by Ray Toll, Old Dominion University's director of coastal resilience research; and the science behind the threat of sea level rise to the region was discussed by Molly Roggero of the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences; leaders of several local school divisions pledged to participate in the initiative.

"We are as concerned about the effect of sea level rise on this community as anybody, but we are newer to the conversation," said Aaron Spence, superintendent of Virginia Beach City Public Schools. "We want to make sure we have a voice at the table, and help out where we can."

Toll, a former U.S. Navy oceanographer who is convener of the pilot project, stressed the importance of receiving input from school divisions in tackling the complex, multifaceted problems associated with rising sea levels.

"We realize how important it is for everyone to have input into this effort, and we haven't included school divisions so far. We want to make sure to figure out a way to include you now."

The region's schools play a key role in emergency planning for the region, serving as shelters in every community in the event of a significant incident such as a hurricane. In addition, schools need to be factored into land-use planning decisions as the region faces a forecast two feet of sea level rise by 2025. Roggero's presentation to the school superintendents noted the number of school buildings that face threats from rising water and storm surge if sea level rise models turn out to be accurate.

The Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Pilot Project, a voluntary, government-initiated, multi-sector collaboration, was created in June 2014 at the request of the White House.

The two-year project seeks to develop a regional "whole of government" and "whole of community" approach to sea level rise preparedness and resilience planning in Hampton Roads that also can be used as a template for other regions.

An interim report on the work of the Pilot through year one will be provided for the White House later this summer.

Upon completion of the pilot project, Hampton Roads will have in place an intergovernmental planning organization that can effectively coordinate the sea level rise preparedness and resilience planning of federal, state and local government agencies and the private sector, taking into account the perspectives and concerns of the citizens of the region.

For information about the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Pilot Project, see the Website of Old Dominion's [Center for Sea Level Rise \(http://www.centerforsealevelrise.org/\)](http://www.centerforsealevelrise.org/).

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