



Virginia Association of First Responders Hosts 1st Annual Virginia First Responder Symposium, June 12-21

Oilville, Va. (March 3, 2026) – The Virginia Association of First Responders (VAFR) is proud to host the **1st Annual Virginia First Responder Symposium** in Blacksburg, Va., from June 12-21, 2026. The event spans nine days of intensive, specialized training in multiple educational tracks covering the wide range of services provided by first responders across the Commonwealth.

The Symposium 2026 marks a deliberate and purposeful transformation in how the VAFR prepares and supports those who protect and serve Virginians. For the first time, this new model brings together professionals in EMS, fire, law enforcement, telecommunications, mental health, public safety chaplaincy, instructors and technical specialists.

“We recognize that no single discipline responds alone and that our greatest strengths lie in working together as one team whenever an emergency happens,” said Kevin Dillard, Chair of the Virginia First Responder Symposium. “Current demands facing today’s first responders require more comprehensive, collaborative and inclusive educational and training opportunities. The 1st Annual Virginia First Responder Symposium represents the next chapter in our organization’s legacy of service.”

Previously known as the Rescue College for 50 years, the event was originally established by the Virginia Association of Volunteer Rescue Squads (VAVRS) as a focused training opportunity primarily for EMS providers, rescue squad personnel and firefighters. More recently, with recent changes in the state regulations regarding training, the event has evolved into a statewide tradition where Virginia’s first responders come together to learn from each other, break down silos and ultimately strengthen the entire public safety system in the Commonwealth.

The 1st Annual Virginia First Responder Symposium in 2026 introduces nine training tracks representing the VAFR’s expanded mission to serve the full spectrum of emergency services throughout the state. Each track listed below includes a selection of core classes, specialty electives and hands-on application across real-world scenarios:

- EMS [NEW: EMS Ride-Alongs with Christiansburg Rescue & Blacksburg Rescue]

- Pediatric
- Law Enforcement
- Fire & Hazmat
- Technical Rescue
- Leadership & Administration
- Mental Health [NEW: a 3-day mini symposium on this topic]
- Telecommunications
- Public Safety Chaplaincy

“Rooted in more than 50 years of tradition and service, the 1st Annual Virginia First Responder Symposium carries forward a proud history while embracing the diverse, modern needs of today’s first responders,” added Dillard. “Whether you are a line-level responder, an officer or supervisor, an instructor or agency leader, the training and education tracks are designed to meet you where your greatest needs lie, while also building shared understanding, trust and cross-discipline collaboration.”

Symposium 2026 will be held at the Virginia Tech & Skelton Conference Center in Blacksburg. This year, with several hundred attendees expected, the event will utilize an expanded network of off-site training venues throughout the Blacksburg region. A [conference brochure](#) listing all of the tracks and training sessions with dates, times and venue locations can be found at vafr.org.

[Registration](#) for the Virginia First Responder Symposium is open from March 1-May 15. Thanks to generous grant funding, **the first 400 VAFR members who register for the Symposium will receive free registration.** If any first responder organization in Virginia has questions about the Symposium or about membership in VAFR, contact vafr@vafr.org.

To view a short video about the rebrand to the Virginia Association of First Responders with a new name with a more inclusive mission, click [here](#). Learn more about the VAFR and its offerings at vafr.org.

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