

# Symposium of the Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment

April 8-10, 2026

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Engineering Research Building, Room 1313  
401 W. Cary St. Richmond, VA

## April 8, 2026

4:30 – 6:30 PM Reception and Student Poster Presentations

## April 9, 2026

### Inaugural Session

**Chair: Catherine Ingrassia**, Dean and Professor, College of Humanities and Sciences, Virginia Commonwealth University

8:30 – 8:45 AM Opening Remarks, **Puru Jena**, Director, Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment, Virginia Commonwealth University

8:45 – 9:00 AM Welcome Address, **Arturo Saavedra**, Interim Provost, Virginia Commonwealth University

9:00 – 9:45 AM Keynote Address, **Jackson Ewing**, Director of Energy and Climate Policy, Nicholas Institute of Energy, Environment & Sustainability, Duke University

9:45 – 10:30 AM **Coffee Break/Posters**

10:30 – 12:00 PM **Session I: Panel - Global Challenges in Sustainable Energy and Environment: From Science to Society**

**Moderator: John Byrne**, President, Foundation for Renewable Energy and Environment and Distinguished Professor of Energy and Climate Policy Emeritus, University of Delaware

**Yushan Yan**, Henry B. du Pont Chair of Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering and Director, Center for Clean Hydrogen, University of Delaware

**Prashant Kamat**, John A Zahm Professor of Science, University of Notre Dame

**Srirama Rao**, Vice President for Research and Innovation, Virginia Commonwealth University

12:00 – 2:00 PM **Lunch/Posters**

### Luncheon Speakers:

12:30 – 1:00 PM **Terry Oggel**, Professor of English, Virginia

Commonwealth University  
*"Twain and Tesla: The Twain Shall Meet"*

- 1:00 – 1:30 PM **Josephus Allmond**, Chief Energy Officer for the Commonwealth of Virginia
- 2:00 – 3:30 PM **Session II: Energy distribution, security, and efficiency**  
**Chairs: Jayasimha Atulasimha**, Engineering Foundation Professor, Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University and **Supriyo Bandyopadhyay**, Commonwealth Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 2:00 – 2:30 PM **Zhifang Wang**, Associate Professor, Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University  
*"Microgrid Resilience to Cyber Attacks"*
- 2:30 – 3:00 PM **Joseph A Haggmann**, Quantum Devices Group Leader, Quantum Information Sciences, Imaging, and Optics, MITRE  
*"Engineering Materials and Devices for Efficient Future Computing Infrastructure"*
- 3:00 – 3:30 PM **Jesse Wilson**, Grid Resilience Coordinator, Virginia Department of Energy  
*"Unpacking the Broad Sector Response to Hurricane Helene"*
- 3:30 - 4:00 PM **Coffee Break**
- 4:00 – 5:30 PM **Session III: Localized Air Pollution on Virginia Communities**  
**Chair: Beth Kreydatus**, Professor, Department of Focused Inquiry, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 4:00 – 4:30 PM **Damian Pitt**, Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Studies and Planning, Virginia Commonwealth University  
**Ivan Suen**, Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Studies and Planning, Virginia Commonwealth University  
*"Localized Air Pollution Impacts from Data Centers in Northern Virginia"*
- 4:30 – 5:00 PM **Lucas Henneman**, Assistant Professor, Environmental Engineering, George Mason University  
*"Air pollution in Virginia: emissions sources and health effects"*
- 5:00 – 5:30 PM **Faith Harris**, Executive Director, Virginia Interfaith Power & Light  
*"Organizing for Environmental Justice: A Real World Experience."*

5:30 – 7:00 PM

**Dinner**

**April 10, 2026**

9:00 – 10:30 AM

**Session IV: Energy of the Future or Now? Fusion Energy in Virginia and Surrounding Region**

**Chair: Lane Carasik**, Assistant Professor, Nuclear Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University

9:00 – 9:30 AM

**Lane Carasik**, Assistant Professor, Nuclear Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University

*“Fusion Energy Sciences R&D within Virginia Commonwealth University”*

9:30 – 10:00 AM

**Ben Byboth**, Director of Power Business Development and Strategy Commonwealth Fusion Systems

*“Commonwealth Fusion Systems: The path to commercial fusion energy”*

10:00 – 10:30 AM

**Troy Carter**, Director, Fusion Energy Division, Oak Ridge National Laboratory

*“Fusion Energy Sciences R&D within Oak Ridge National Laboratory”*

10:30 – 11:00 AM

**Coffee Break**

11:00 – 12:30 PM

**Session V: Panel - Education and Outreach**

**Moderator: Kristin Carleton**, Assistant Professor, Interior Design, Virginia Commonwealth University

**Laura Battaglia**, Assistant Professor, Interior Design, Virginia Commonwealth University and **Student Presenters**

**Erin A. Speck**, Assistant Professor, Interior Architecture Program, George Washington University

**Andrea Simonelli**, Associate Professor, Thrust 4 Research Director, Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment, Virginia Commonwealth University

**John Fife**, Associate Professor, STEM Education, Virginia Commonwealth University

12:30 – 2:00 PM

**Lunch**

- 1:15 – 2:00 PM                   **Luncheon Speakers: Sara Bouchard**, VCUarts Kinetic Imaging instructor and **Chris Gough**, Executive Director, VCU Rice Rivers Center, School of Life Sciences and Sustainability  
*“En Masse: Giving voice to the carbon cycle”*
- 2:00 – 3:30 PM                   **Session VI: Effect on human health and life**  
**Chairs: Leah Spangler**, Assistant Professor, Chemical and Life Science Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University and **Michael Donnenberg** Professor of Internal Medicine, Microbiology & Immunology, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology School of Medicine
- 2:00 – 2:30 PM                   **Amir Sapkota**, Chair of Epidemiology, University of Maryland School of Public Health  
*“Climate Change, Wildfire, and Patients with End-Stage Kidney Disease - Need for Better Adaptation Strategies”*
- 2:30 – 3:00 PM                   **James R. Allison, III**, Associate Professor, Department of History, Christopher Newport University  
*“Manifesting Power: The Geologists, Boosters, and Capitalists that Built the Appalachian Coal Regime”*
- 3:00 – 3:30 PM                   **Brian C. Verrelli**, Professor, School of Life Sciences and Sustainability, Virginia Commonwealth University  
*“Resilient Cities, Healthy People: Using Evolutionary Models to Power Nature-Based Solutions”*
- 3:30 – 4:00 PM                   **Coffee Break**
- 4:00 – 5:30 PM                   **Session VII: Panel - Industry and Government Partnership**  
**Moderator: Radhika Barua**, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Mechanical & Nuclear Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University
- Shaun Mathew**, Virginia Clean Energy Innovation Bank, Virginia Department of Energy
- Braden Croy**, Program Director, Dominion Energy Innovation Corporation
- Robert Williamson Gray**, Climate and Water Strategist, Dupont
- Vamsi K. Yadavalli**, Program Manager, NSF CMMI Division, Professor, Department of Chemical and Life Science Engineering, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 5:30 – 5:45 PM                   **Concluding Remarks**

**Chair: Jayasimha Atulasimha**, Engineering Foundation Professor  
Professor, Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering,  
Virginia Commonwealth University

5:45 – 7:00 PM

**Closing Reception**