Fellow VAHMRS members, 25 February 2019

I am humbled and honored to have been elected your president at our meeting last week. It has been my privilege to be a member of this organization for many years, and serve in different positions. I would like to thank Todd Dyer, the officers, and the committee members that served last year. It was a challenging year in many ways, and in the interest of public safety we had to cancel our 35th annual Hazmat Conference due to hurricane Florence. We did get in one day of pre-conference classes. I am also very thankful for our officers and committee members who chose to serve this year. This term will be challenging as well, we have a lot to do between now and September. A special thanks to Paul Mauger who has agreed to serve as our conference chair. We will need his expertise more than ever!

I wanted to share my thoughts and vision for our association. We have identified three priorities for the next six months.

1. **Prepare and deliver our best hazmat conference ever**

We were geared up and ready for a great conference last year, our 35th annual! We will carry over as much as possible from last year, and have identified a few improvements. We will lean on the expertise of Paul, Tom Jordan, and Peggy Tucker to make this year’s conference better than ever. Our conference committee is very dedicated and know what we need to get done. We will have an updated conference format, a new facility, and we will all be in the same building again. So, what can you do? Be engaged, follow our website, and make sure that all of your local, state, federal, and private industry partners attend our conference!

1. **Build our membership**

Our association membership is about 150 strong at this time, we can do much better! If you consider the number of local, state, federal, and private industry stakeholders that have a role in the manufacturing, transporting, regulating, responding to incidents, and environmental cleanup of hazardous materials we could have 1,000’s of members. Our dues are only $25 per year, so it’s not the money. We have to build ***value*** in our membership. There has been much discussion over the past few years of how to do this. We have provided support to the York County/VDEM partnership at the Hazmat Training Center. There is tremendous potential there for our members. We will work closely with the training center staff to develop opportunities for our members. We will move forward with the idea of a “Hazmat Weekend” with specialized training, and maybe a “Hazmat Challenge” to close out the weekend. This has been discussed for years, it’s time to make this happen. Also, we have upgraded our website and are well positioned now to use the platform to provide more information, training, networking, etc. Thanks to Ben Zimmerman for his efforts, and agreeing to continue this year. It is critical that our membership be strong and engaged on issues effecting our profession. There has been a long-standing misconception that our association is only for ***Hazmat Specialists***. The first level of response, and arguably the most important, is Hazmat Operations. These folks show up with the least information, and have to make the most critical decisions for life safety. We absolutely need them in our association! We need to reach out to these folks, our regulatory agencies, the transportation sectors, and the environmental specialists. If we show value and activity, our membership numbers should grow exponentially!

1. **Refocus our efforts to the safety and training of hazmat responders**

We have been very blessed with great leaders and visionaries, both in our profession and in our association. It becomes easy to rest on our laurels. I challenge all of us to take a deep look at our association. Are we where we want to be? Are we doing the best that we can for our responders? Are we as individuals stepping up, being involved, being engaged? Our association will focus on improving communication, training, and safety for our responders at all levels. There are significant issues on the radar that need our engagement and support. Since the new edition of NFPA 472 has been released, VDFP has commissioned a committee to rewrite the VA Hazmat Operations program. We have several members of our association serving on this committee. Virginia has been a leader on the national level for 30 years, it is important that we maintain the highest level of training for our responders. The threats are constantly changing, our responders deserve the best training possible. Also, due to cuts in federal grant monies and lack of sustainment funding at the state level, VDEM has commissioned a committee to review all of the state level special operations teams. We are in communication with the state coordinator and have offered any assistance that we could provide.

If we all work together, we will have no problem meeting these priorities.

This is a short “year” so we will keep the existing committees in place, and respectfully request all standing committee members to serve until our September meeting. We will be sending out a request for members to serve on a **Membership Committee**. The thought is a regional approach to grow membership. A big thanks to Chris Sadler for serving as Vice-President, Paul Mauger for serving as Treasurer, and Stephanie Brown for serving as Secretary. Congratulations to Jack Tolbert for being elected to Trustee. I look forward to working with you all! I have been extremely blessed in this profession by serving on some amazing teams. It sounds cliché, but there is no “me” or “I” in what we do. This is OUR association, and to be great we will need everyone participating at some level. We appreciate your continued support, stay tuned…..

Respectfully,

Wade