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Law School News

Marine Law Symposium at RWU Law to Focus on Legal Strategies for Climate Adaptation

Nov. 16 event will be part of RWU's yearlong series, "Ocean State/State of the Ocean: The Challenge of Sea-Level Rise Over the Coming Century"



November 8, 2018 Edward Fitzpatrick

BRISTOL, R.I. – The 11th Marine Law Symposium will bring top experts to the Roger Williams University School of Law on Friday, Nov. 16, to address legal strategies for climate adaptation in coastal New England.

Co-hosted by the [Marine Affairs Institute](#), [Rhode Island Sea Grant](#) and the [Georgetown Climate Center](#), the symposium is part of a yearlong RWU series titled "Ocean State/State of the Ocean: The Challenge of Sea-Level Rise Over the Coming Century."

"Communities across New England are facing a different climate than they had a decade ago," said Julia Wyman, director of the Marine Affairs Institute, a partnership of RWU Law, Rhode

Island Sea Grant and the University of Rhode Island. “Some of the changes they are seeing are an increase in flooding roads during regular rain events, more frequent and stronger storm events, and an increase in sea-level rise and coastal erosion. State and local governments are being presented with complex challenges on how to adapt existing laws, policies and regulations to the changing environment. This daylong event will present both practical and innovative ways for state and local governments to address current and future climate risks in their planning.”

Shaun O’Rourke, Director of Stormwater and Resiliency for the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank and the State of Rhode Island’s Chief Resilience Officer, will kick off the symposium with an overview of the physical problems facing states and municipalities related to climate change.

The program will include a presentation, “Adapting to the Deluge: Emerging Legal Issues from Recent Hurricane Seasons,” by Dena Adler, a Climate Law Fellow at Columbia Law School. It will include a discussion, “Are State and Local Governments Liable for a Failure to Adapt to a Changing Climate?” by Elena Mihaly and Deanna Moran of the Conservation Law Foundation. And it will include a presentation, “Infrastructure & Sea-Level Rise: Legal Challenges for Local Government Maintenance of Infrastructure,” by Thomas Ruppert, Coastal Planning Specialist for the Florida Sea Grant.

In the afternoon, attendees will be able to participate in break-out sessions with the speakers, allowing them to share their experiences with the issues.

“This symposium is a great example of what the Marine Affairs Institute at RWU Law does best,” RWU Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky said. “As the world comes to grips with the threats posed by climate change, the symposium will drill down into the legal and policy issues presented by steps that coastal communities can and should take to become more resilient. Unfortunately, the necessary steps pose complex legal issues, not to mention formidable technological challenges. Fortunately, the symposium will bring together legal and policy experts to talk in detail about how those legal issues can be overcome. These are some of the most consequential legal challenges of our time.”

The symposium will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 16 in the Honorable Bruce M. Selya Appellate Courtroom (Room 283) at RWU Law. The public is invited to attend. The cost is \$20 per person. Students may attend for free, and RWU undergraduate students are welcome to attend a special screening in the RWU Law bistro. The event offers 6.5 continuing legal education credits and 5.5 certified flood plain manager credits.