March 2018: New Year Begins with Several Industry-Related Deaths

SWANA Calls for Renewed Safety Focus & Efforts in 2018

Silver Spring, MD – In the first ten days of 2018, there were seven solid waste-related fatalities in the United States. These tragedies come just weeks after the Bureau of Labor Statistics again identified solid waste collection as the fifth deadliest job in the U.S., based on 2016 data.

The seven fatal incidents occurred in Pennsylvania, New York, Georgia, Virginia, Massachusetts and North Carolina, and involved large solid waste companies, regional haulers, and municipal sanitation departments. With six of the seven incidents involving solid waste collection, this disturbing start to 2018 reinforces the urgent need to create a safer environment for industry employees and the public.

“I am very disappointed by the number of fatal incidents in the first ten days of 2018; each of them is a tragedy and serves as a reminder that the entire industry needs to improve its safety culture,” said David Biderman, the Solid Waste Association of North America’s (SWANA) Executive Director and CEO. “We urge companies and local governments to not only take the time to educate supervisors and employees, but also commit to making safety a workplace priority. Nothing we do at SWANA is more important.”

While the uptick in fatalities to start the New Year is alarming, 2017 saw high numbers as well. SWANA is aware of more than 100 fatal incidents involving the solid waste sector in the U.S., and several more in Canada. With the frequency increasing in the first few days of 2018, SWANA is committed to increasing its safety resources even further to jumpstart efforts throughout North America.

Through multiple 2018 events and programs, SWANA will bring together solid waste professionals from across North America to share safety best practices and plan future industry initiatives. Safety will be a major topic at both SWANApalooza in Denver, Colorado, this March, and at WASTECON in August in Nashville, Tennessee, where SWANA’s 6th Annual Safety Summit will take place. In the coming months, SWANA and its Chapter-based Safety Ambassadors will launch an initiative aimed at small haulers to provide resources, in multiple languages, to their drivers and helpers.

“We need to be more creative in our safety efforts and target smaller companies and local governments who may lack the resources and expertise to provide safety training and information to their front-line workers,” stated Tom Parker, Associate at CH2M Hill and SWANA Safety Committee Chair.

Keeping the seven deaths that have already occurred in 2018 front-of-mind, SWANA will continue to grow its safety program to reduce industry injuries and fatalities, with the goal of moving solid waste collection off the list of most dangerous jobs and getting employee’s home to their loved ones safely, every day.

For more information on SWANA’s Safety Program, visit swana.org/safety.