



Significant Increase in Fatal Work Injuries for Solid Waste Collection Workers

On December 17, 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) released its *2018 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI)* and the data, though expected, were disappointing. SWANA released a [statement](#) noting that, by industry category (NAICS 562111), solid waste collection workers suffered 57 on-the-job fatalities, compared to 32 the year before—a 78 percent increase in deaths in just one year. In addition to those 57—that include collection route worker and transfer stations—there were three landfill employee and three material recovery facility (MRF) employee work-related deaths for a total of 63 solid waste worker fatalities in 2018. According to the [BLS News Release](#), refuse and recyclable material collection remains the fifth most dangerous occupation in the U.S. Noting that it is not just our workers being killed, SWANA Executive Director and CEO David Biderman stated that, "...SWANA is aware of about 100 third-party fatalities last year involving other drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists in the United States and Canada."

SWANA recognizes that safety must be the number one concern if together we are to get solid waste collection off the top ten most dangerous jobs list once and for all.

OSHA/SWANA/NWRA National Alliance

In a major step to help protect the health and safety of workers in the solid waste industry, the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA), the National Waste and Recycling Association (NWRA) and the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) signed an Alliance agreement to "collaborate on safety training and education efforts with a focus on backovers and distracted driving, slips, trips, and falls, needlestick injuries, heat and cold stress, and musculoskeletal injuries" and to provide association members and the public with "information, guidance, and access to resources to help protect" those workers.

To accomplish this, the Alliance developed a work plan of activities to be undertaken to support accomplishment of its objectives during the two-year timeframe of the agreement. Those objectives are to:

1. Share information on OSHA's National Initiatives (Emphasis Programs, Regulatory Agenda, Outreach), and opportunities to participate in initiatives and the rulemaking process.

2. Share information on occupational safety and health laws and standards, including the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers.
3. Develop information on the recognition and prevention of transportation hazards such as backovers and distracted driving; slips, trips, and falls; needlestick injuries; heat and cold stress; musculoskeletal injuries; and other solid waste industry hazards, and the value of safety and health programs in improving safety performance. Communicate such information (e.g., via the Safety Monday e-newsletter, the OSHA, NWRA, and SWANA websites, and other mechanisms, as appropriate) to employers and workers in the solid waste industry.
4. Speak, exhibit, or appear at OSHA, NWRA, and SWANA conferences, local or regional meetings, or other events, such as WasteExpo, WASTECON, and SWANApalooza.
5. Convene or participate in forums, roundtable discussions, or stakeholder meetings on solid waste industry hazards to help forge innovative solutions in the workplace or to provide input on safety and health issues.
6. Collaborate with other Alliance Program participants to address workplace safety and health issues, such as needlestick hazards in solid waste and recycling collection and processing.
7. Encourage NWRA and SWANA members and other industry stakeholders to build relationships with OSHA's Regional and Area Offices; participate in OSHA's Cooperative Programs, including the Safety & Health Achievement Recognition Program and the Voluntary Protection Program; and utilize OSHA's On-Site Consultation Program to improve health and safety in solid waste industry workplaces.

Let's all please do whatever we can to support the Alliance's efforts to improve worker safety. There may be an opportunity for some frontline workers to participate on a worker safety and health advisory committee to provide input on Alliance activities and work products. If you have any questions, please contact me at dennis.batts@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Remember—safety is a team sport and we are all in this together! -Dennis