

# WASTE NEWS<sup>™</sup>

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## **Speakers: Greener equals safer**

**By: Joe Truini**

**Charlotte, N.C. -- September 25, 2006**

Greener products could create safer working conditions for one of the nation's most dangerous occupations.

Waste collection and disposal ranks as the fifth most dangerous job in the United States, and the industry needs to focus on training programs and education to reduce the risk, said Thomas Parker, president of the Solid Waste Association of North America.

Parker was named president of the association Sept. 20 during Wastecon 2006, SWANA's annual conference, held Sept. 19-21 in Charlotte.

More environmentally friendly products also will reduce the hazards solid waste workers face, said Scott Cassel, executive director of the Product Stewardship Institute.

Toxicity is one of the main concerns when handling solid waste, whether it is mercury or other hazardous substances, he said.

By working together to push product stewardship, SWANA and PSI can make the workplace safer, Cassel said. Internalizing disposal costs in the price of a product gives manufacturers an incentive to make less toxic goods.

And the move wouldn't take a big policy shift from SWANA, he said. The group already has incorporated pieces of PSI's Principles of Product Stewardship to develop some of its own goals.

"It's part of what you already do," he said.

There also needs to be a fundamental shift in how solid waste is thought of to increase reuse and recycling, as well as the

manufacturing of more recycled-content products, Parker said.

"We all need to treat solid waste as a resource," he said. "I challenge everyone here today to use less and recycle more."

But significantly boosting the nation's recycling rate is going to take a shared effort from all the stakeholders, including waste management professionals, the waste management industry, environmental groups, manufacturers and consumers, Cassel said.

"We're not going to get all the way from here to that vision right away," he said.

"We've got to work together."

Lifecycle management, from mining to manufacturing to recycling and disposal, has to be examined to find out how to make the safest and most environmentally friendly products, Cassel said. PSI already is working with stakeholders representing different industries, such as electronics, paint and mercury thermostats, to improve product stewardship through cooperative efforts.

"It's different for each product and it's different for each category of stakeholder," he said. "We can't have a discussion without the right players in the room."

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