

# Tim Flanagan

As former Monterey Regional Waste Management District (MRWMD) general manager and now a project director with SCS Engineers in Pleasanton, California, Tim Flanagan brings both public and private solid waste experience to the table. On July 1, Flanagan will assume the role of SWANA president. “SWANA is a world-class organization,” says Flanagan. “Our industry is fortunate to have an organization like SWANA that’s been there for so long to support public and private initiatives and keep ahead of the increased demand for waste diversion, waste minimization, recycling, and proper handling of those discards. We are an umbrella organization made up of different public and private sector elements, including waste collectors, processors, and landfill operators. We have a substantial base of consultants supporting these industries.” Flanagan says he prides himself on being a collaborator, bringing people with different backgrounds together, and listening to them to provide the common elements that work among those at the table to ensure everyone is focused on the same goal. “We may come at it differently, but helping people understand and recognize value in these different approaches” is key, Flanagan notes. “One thing I’m going to look to focus on in my term as president is how do we develop more collaboration. We’re at a crossroads in the industry where significant amounts of requests for waste diversion, recycling, and minimization are occurring. It has to be done in an economic framework. That means we have to be very creative and collaborative to make those disparate goals work together.” Flanagan’s SWANA involvement includes directing its recycling and special waste technical division, serving as SWANA’s international board vice president and past Gold Rush chapter president. Flanagan has earned many honors for his work. In 2016, SWANA’s sustainable material management division recognized him with its Distinguished Individual Achievement Award. He was recently named “Person of the Year” by the Monterey Bay chapter of the American Public Works Association, recognizing his involvement in a range of public works projects bringing a positive impact on the environment and community.

## WHAT HE DOES DAY TO DAY

“My job is to provide guidance and information for those client customers seeking cost-effective solutions to their challenges around waste minimization, recycling diversion, and solid waste management,” says Flanagan. “I provide for my clients 40 years of experience—they have the benefit of my and our company’s experience to end up with successful programs and projects.”

## WHAT LED HIM INTO THIS LINE OF WORK

Flanagan earned a B.A. in public policy and economics from the University of California Santa Barbara and was



on a career path to be involved in politics. A series of events led him to filling a job opening as solid waste manager for Palo Alto, one of the country’s leaders in recycling. Flanagan’s background in public policy and the private and public sectors helps inform his work in recycling, waste diversion, and solid waste management. “There is so much intersection with local, regional, and state government,” Flanagan notes. In addition to working for Palo Alto, Flanagan worked for the County of Santa Clara before moving to the private sector as Waste Management’s western region director of recycling.

## WHAT HE LIKES BEST ABOUT HIS WORK

“You never know what’s going to happen on any day,” Flanagan points out. “There is a lot of diversity in the job. You have to be a business person, a counselor when you have employees. You have to be a strategist. You have to be able to be a communicator to internal and external stakeholders. I think I’ve been successful because I enjoy people and working in elements that make everyone focus and work together.”

## HIS GREATEST CHALLENGE

Flanagan says his current challenge is a lack of technical prowess in learning to pivot and work remotely during the COVID pandemic, adding that he recommends those in the industry keep current with their technology skills. He also works to meet the challenges they face. “The women and men who collect the trash, process and handle the trash, bury the trash, and provide education are unsung heroes,” he says. “Sometimes they are taken for granted, but you sure recognize it when they’re not there.” **MSW**

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