

Announcer ([00:02](#)):

You are listening to the Safety Moment Podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

Mike Sullivan ([00:15](#)):

Today we're chatting with Ed Plant and Gordon Campbell, the chairs of the Utility Safety Partners and CCGA Best Practices Committees respectively. We're going to be talking about well, best practices, how they evolved, what the whole situation was, when they were necessary, what's the relationship between best practices and legislation standards, all of that type thing. Everything you were, you've always wanted to know about best practices, but so far we're afraid to ask. Gentlemen, welcome to the podcast.

Ed Plant ([00:45](#)):

Hello.

Gordon Campbell ([00:45](#)):

Hello. I'm glad to be one of the few returning guests.

Mike Sullivan ([00:51](#)):

You are one of the returning guests. I think Ed, have you've been on here before? This is your first time.

Ed Plant ([00:55](#)):

No, I'm a newbie for sure.

Mike Sullivan ([00:57](#)):

You're a newbie. Okay. Well, we talked so much. Maybe I just thought that maybe we had done this before. Now, before we begin, I mean Gord, you're a returning guy. Just tell us a little bit about yourself before we get going here.

Gordon Campbell ([01:09](#)):

Well, I'm a technical trainer and OQ evaluator with ACON Utilities, but my background is in Roger's communications and that's where I started my career in the best practices at the O R C G A and then C C G A. And I've been doing that for just over 10 years now.

Mike Sullivan ([01:30](#)):

Time flies and yeah, I remember when all that was just starting and you were heavily engaged back 10 years ago when the harmonization process was beginning. We're going to be talking about that a little bit later, but yeah, that's amazing to me. It's been probably 10 years or more. Ed, how about you? If you can give us a little bit of background about yourself.

Ed Plant ([01:50](#)):

Sure. So I'm Ed Plant. I'm with T E P, right of WAY Coordination Inc. My background is I'm a former city of Edmonton, right of way manager, roadway designer and also utility coordinator on various infrastructure projects across Canada. And I've been involved with the former entity, A B C G A, and now

with Utility Safety Partners. My current role is the chair of the Best Practices committee. And yeah, I've been working in the telecom and utility world for quite some time now.

Mike Sullivan ([02:33](#)):

What is exactly a best practice? I mean for the folks like ourselves in the industry, it's something we hear a lot. We've been around it a lot, but for the general population, what is the best practice when it comes to safety process or in our world, the damage prevention process? Gordon, maybe you can answer that from a national perspective.

Gordon Campbell ([02:54](#)):

Well, usually it starts out as a great idea. It's vetted and it comes out and it's just considered not the best way to do it, but one way in which you can get to the desired outcome. And of course safety is the key to all of our best practices,

Mike Sullivan ([03:19](#)):

And we'll get to this later when the relationship between best practice and legislation. But if somebody has an idea for a best practice, is it, does cost ever come into play? I mean, a best practice could be very costly. Does that still mean it's the right way to do things?

Gordon Campbell ([03:40](#)):

Well, we never factor in the cost. Even at the CSA level, we try to stay away from those kind of things. Of course, at the operations level, you might have a cost prohibitive best practice. It doesn't mean it has to be adopted, but the industry has accepted that this is the safest maybe way to do something and we just leave it with the person that wants to adopt it on how they're going to implement it. They can certainly change it and adjust it.

Mike Sullivan ([04:14](#)):

Ed, maybe you can give me an example of what is a best practice and how does that factor into the way people work?

Ed Plant ([04:22](#)):

There's lots of different best practices and as Gordon has mentioned, it percolates up from the practices or the procedures that companies or individuals have found to be effective, useful, whether that's forwarding things for safety reasons or if it's just more efficient and is a cost saving or a timeline saving, saving. But one of the best practices that is slowly becoming used up here in Canada is this practice of using subsurface utility engineering, right? It is a practice that's more prevalent in the United States, but more and more that best practice that way of doing some additional investigation to find unknown utilities. That's an example of a best practice.

Mike Sullivan ([05:24](#)):

So about we've established what a best practice is, but we really haven't talked about what it isn't. When we've had discussions before and I've been involved in different meetings in different places and in conferences and discussions, there seems to be some confusion from time to time of the relationship between a best practice legislation standards. Maybe Gord, you can explain that because, well, let me

just, I'll leave it there for the moment then I might challenge you on that. But what is that relationship between those three?

Gordon Campbell ([06:04](#)):

Well, a best practice is an optional thing. Legislation of course is the highest in the hierarchy. It was, it's a law, it has to be followed, but of course it has to be the most permissive level, and so it will sometimes need standards and best practices to help out how do I implement that law? So the Canadian standard, which you and I know and Ed knows really well, is there to assist legislation where legislation can't go, but the C S A can go. And then of course a best practice can only be adopted by choice and it may go further into the operationalization of that legislation. So we have to remember that legislation as necessary as it is, is going to be the most permissive in all of

Mike Sullivan ([07:05](#)):

Them. That's actually probably one of the best explanations I've heard to date on the relationship between best practice and legislation now and standards as well. Can a best practice or does a best practice ever become legislation

Gordon Campbell ([07:23](#)):

As much as we'd love it to? No, so far he usually wouldn't. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([07:30](#)):

But I guess it can influence legislation, can it not?

Gordon Campbell ([07:34](#)):

Absolutely. The C C G A best practice has been a seed document in many other documents. It was part of the writing of the C S A standard. We hope it gets brought in Bill Ontario when they were bringing that in, they were using the best practice document to help them along there. So we love it as a seed document to go all out and help those people. There's no sense them having to start from the ground and develop these things from the bottom up. So it's a great start for everything to take this information, use it as they can, adopt it as much as they can and develop either a standard or a law.

Ed Plant ([08:23](#)):

And I think that that's a good example. A best practice was mandatory registration of underground assets with the provincial or regional one call center. It was a best practice for years before it became a law, before it became legislation. And that I think that's where a case as the best practice influenced legislation, not the other way around.

Mike Sullivan ([08:50](#)):

And that continues to happen today. I mean although the legislation that we so much desire and other provinces beyond Ontario, we're still waiting. We're still trying to push that, but it is a seed document and we look at the harmonized best practices in Canada, and I want to talk about that in a moment too. But it should be moving that forward. It should be part of those seed documents that move legislation forward. Now, you talked about the origins of a best practice from the grassroots Gord. When you're giving an explanation of the legislation and best practice relationship, can you walk me through the typical life cycle of a, but actually, I mean before that, what exactly is a, and I'm making air quotes here.

Gordon Campbell ([09:41](#)):

Oh, you're going to hold me to the definition now. It's been so many years of saying, well, maybe we

Mike Sullivan ([09:47](#)):

See what does stand for. I think it's a transaction request, but even that is kind of some lingo that nobody really understands.

Gordon Campbell ([09:56](#)):

Yeah, it is a transaction request and it's just a formalized piece, a piece of paper that we ask people to put their thoughts down with. And we've actually put a addendum in the current version four to help people with the wording because that's always the toughest part is they, they'll put something down and we'll need to develop it, but anybody anywhere can fill out this form and submit it to their regional partner. They will invite them to come in and provide some clarity. They will debate it, they will give them feedback on it, they will help word it the right way, and then it'll go into being accepted by that regional partner. And once that regional partner accepts it, it's now forward off to the national cga and we take a look at it, make sure it fits the format that we all want to seed in, and then we pass it on to all the other regional partners across Canada for feedback and usually takes one or two cycles for that to go through all the committees and then we get it back and we are looking for consensus. And I think that's the important word in this whole process. It's not a veto. Nobody gets to opt out. We all live by this word consensus where you can't say no. You have to agree to it at some point. So you have to either come provide the feedback at why this doesn't work for you or you just may not accept it. But voting no is not an option, and that's worked for the last 10 years and we really stand by that process so that it's inclusive to everybody.

Mike Sullivan ([11:48](#)):

Well, it's certainly, it invites engagement or almost demands engagement. You can't walk away from this.

Gordon Campbell ([11:57](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And that's can be tough for some people because in their own company they could never pass that, but yet you have to come to a compromise and decide what can I live with? And then you're passing on that consensus. And that's a tough thing to do across the country because there's so many different situations and we find it a real struggle at the national level to try to get everybody's opinions covered without turning things back. We don't want to say that this isn't a best practice. It is somehow

Mike Sullivan ([12:38](#)):

It sounds like a lengthy process. And in today's world, everybody wants everything right away. How do you manage that? And maybe give Ed, maybe if you can talk about that a little bit, A great idea comes forth and they bring it to the Alberta Committee Best Practices Committee and everybody's gung ho, let's got this thing going. How long does that process take?

Ed Plant ([13:06](#)):

Good question. And it really all depends on what that idea is. So just on average for a transaction report to be received, reviewed, circulated, and commented on by the best practice committee members takes

at least a month just normally that's the process that we follow, rightly or wrongly. And then it gets on the agenda for the following meeting whenever that is. So the review and commenting on it might occur like a month or so before the next meeting. So again, there's a delay there. Once it's vetted by the regional or provincial best practices committee, depending on the issue it can take, can be passed to be forwarded up to the national committee fairly quickly. But if there's not consensus amongst the regional or provincial body, it could take months as the issue is debated as rationale is provided and as people become comfortable with the suggested best practice. So I would suggest that it could take anywhere between two and two months to a year realistically.

Mike Sullivan ([14:38](#)):

And that's with really, I mean how many people are we talking about in the room? Provincially? So many. But nationally, I mean we're not talking a cast of 50 or 60 or a hundred people here. These are smaller numbers than compared to say the CGA in the us.

Ed Plant ([14:59](#)):

Yeah, it would be smaller for sure, but because whether one sector or one company has a best practice idea doesn't necessarily mean it is accepted by others. And so unfortunately, the debate sometimes goes around a bit too long until people are comfortable with it. But you're right, Mike, there's not hundreds of people involved in it, but there's some key people involved. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([15:30](#)):

I remember the famous seven inch screen for mobile devices. That was probably the, is it the high water mark or the low water mark of the best practice committee. But that discussion created a lot of awareness, I think around what a best practice is. It actually had a hidden benefit to that whole discussion. But that is an example, I guess, of how long things can take. I know in the cga, sorry, in the us, the Common Ground Alliance best practices committee that one of the first times I walked into a room there where the best prra practice committee was meeting where the best practice committee was meeting in person. There were hundreds of people in that room and it slows things to a snail's pace. Now we don't have that good or bad here in Canada, but the process can still take some time. How do you maintain the enthusiasm? I mean, if somebody has a good idea, you want to implement it as quickly as possible. So how do you maintain that enthusiasm moving forward?

Gordon Campbell ([16:38](#)):

Well, I think it's important to temper that enthusiasm with the reality that we need buy in from other people. Certainly when I put in my first TRs, I thought these things would go, there's no way that they could be slow. And as you pointed out, the electronic locates that took three years and a lot of passion to push that through, but it's really important that we get that consensus and you may have to accept a lesser best practice. Certainly we did when we put the electronic locates, it was certainly much tougher the first time it went up, then the part that we accepted. But there's a lot of soul searching on contemplating what other regions might see as a problem and accepting that and having to take the best of,

Mike Sullivan ([17:39](#)):

I know it's early, but I'm asking you to save the date and mark your calendars for February 26th through 28th at the Bat Springs Hotel. We hope to see you there to help us celebrate Utility Safety Partners, Alberta One Call Corporation's 40 year history. In 1984, we began taking our first locate request. Now

millions of locate requests later it's time to celebrate and not only as Alberta One Call, but as Utility Safety Partners, the unified front of Alberta One Call Corporation, the Alberta Common Ground Alliance and wears the line unified under one umbrella to keep you safe.

(18:28):

Okay, now we have the best practice. It's, it's gone through the process. It's began the grassroots, it went to the regional partner, it was adopted there. It was brought forth to the national committee. It went through the challenges there. Now it's been accepted. Once it's approved, it goes into the CCGAs harmonized best practices. Do the other C G A regional partner committees, so not just the regional partner committees, but also the CCGA committees, for example, education awareness committee or the dirt committee, do they promote those as well? I mean, the goal is to reduce damages. So how has that best practice shifted from just appearing in the harmonized best practice to promoting it and hopefully reducing damages? We're trying to establish root cause and come up with best practices that will address the root cause of damages. How do we complete that loop?

Gordon Campbell (19:28):

Well, unfortunately, until this year, we were all in our silo. We were creating these best practices, publishing them, releasing that book, and then not really doing much after that. And it was the discussion with the DIRT report and some of their findings afterwards that we came to the conclusion that we should respond to some of these numbers and relate them to a best practice. Or we're hoping to do that before the next DIRT report, that if they have a finding that we can somehow relate it to a best practice. Here's how we can work on that.

Mike Sullivan (20:09):

It really comes down to the whole plan, do review, learn, right? I mean, that is the process. The plan is to establish the best practice and then you implement it, review it in terms of the dirt report, why are those best practices meeting the intended purpose? And then review and learn from that and then implement another best practice or implement changes to those best practices. That's really what it comes down to. And if the C G A and the regional partners can follow that cycle, then logically we are going to reduce damages. And we have seen that in some areas. I mean, it used to be where that locate, sorry, damages without a locate request was much higher. That number has come down in recent years. It's still too high. It's still in the 26 or seven percentile, but it is coming down. There were years when it was close to 50%, and that's a good thing. So people are doing their work there, but it really comes down to that plan, do and review and learn. Ed for Alberta beyond reviewing the harmonized best practices, the Alberta Committee is also reviewing the damage prevention process in Alberta. Now, before I ask any more questions about that, maybe you can explain what that document is and when it began, it predates the harmonized best practices.

Ed Plant (21:38):

Correct. There was versions under the umbrella of the A B C G A back in the late nineties, and then early two thousands the documents were assembled and distributed. There's been a series of them over the years, and we know, as you mentioned, we're looking at it again. And it's a way that we can explain how the national best practices get implemented in the Alberta environment. And I don't mean the environment like nature, but in the legislative arena, in the policies and procedures that companies and municipalities and agencies in Alberta have their own regulations and procedures suggesting how those best practices get implemented in Alberta. And there are nuances there. As Gord explained the consensus documents, the best practices across Canada have to be worded in such a way that they're

applicable across Canada. While, for an example, some of the legislation in Ontario and British Columbia are different than Alberta. So the damage prevention process document, the guideline is meant to explain this is what it says in the best practice, in the national best practice, and this is how you would implement that in Alberta. So it's more of an explanatory guide than anything.

Mike Sullivan ([23:29](#)):

And yet Alberta is the only province that has a document like that.

Ed Plant ([23:33](#)):

It's something that is a best practice to have this implementation guide. So maybe it's something that the other regional partners can look to in the future. We wouldn't suggest that the damage prevention process document in Alberta would be applicable necessarily in these other regions or provinces because of the nuances. A classic example is in Ontario and British Columbia roads where a lot of the utilities and a lot of the work is done in are titled, whereas in Alberta they're not. So that changes some of the best practices in when it comes to some of the administrative roles. So those kind of things need to be explained locally to be, be easier to be implemented.

Mike Sullivan ([24:34](#)):

That does explain it because it has been around a long time. It predates the C C G A best practices and also predates a lot of the provincial best practices that began prior to the harmonized process. Gord, we talked at the very top of this podcast about the harmonization process and what that was like. Ontario, the Ontario Regional Common Ground Alliance produced first Canadian best practice. It was for that specific province. And then I believe Quebec adopted it and they translated to French. There were some nuances made, some changes made there. British Columbia did the same and they made some modifications. All of a sudden we had three documents that were calling themselves best practices, and yet they were different. And back 10 years ago, if not longer, there was that initiative to harmonize the best practices. What was that like? I mean, we know how long it takes for a TR to be one reviewed and adopted or debated. What was that like just to go through that because people got entrenched. I mean, this is now mine. I have this in my province and I've made it ours. And how did that go

Gordon Campbell ([25:48](#)):

That that was a rough ride? Probably not so much for Ontario, but certainly the rest of the provinces. We had just finished, I believe version seven, and we're ready to go more forward with the next version when it was brought up between Doug and yourself about harmonizing the best practice. And we were quite willing to share that document. And when it went out for review to the different provinces, it started to get picked apart and that became pretty troublesome. And it kind of came down to, you have to take the whole book as is or we can't do this. And so it went through gladly. Everybody accepted that as the baseline. And immediately there was 70 or 80 TRS start transforming the book, which was absolutely perfect. We could make a better document, but it, it's a very tough sell. I know that Doug Lap at the time and Jim Douglas did the, yeah, Jim Douglas, I forgot. Yep. That far back had to do a lot of work to keep that together. And even today, I'm sure the other provinces just like Ontario, want to just take the book back and not have to go through the trouble of getting somebody else's approval. But we kind of pride ourselves that we did this, we're going to stick it out and we've got to continue to work at it.

Mike Sullivan ([27:26](#)):

I remember it quite well. I think I was chairing the C C G at the time and had some friends who were on that best practice harmonization team. And harmonization was a bit of an oxymoron because there wasn't a lot of harmony in the process, but it did move forward quite well. And exactly as you said, at the end of the day, it moved forward the way it should have. And I remember Jim Douglas being quite adamant that, as you said, the Ontario document had to be accepted in full, not in part. And he was absolutely right. It took a little while for everybody to understand why, but here we are probably 10 years or longer now since that that took place. And we're still working in harmony and perhaps more harmony than we ever have before. There's been recognition that of the strength in numbers and for those utility owners and the transmission pipelines that are crossing multiple provinces, it makes a lot of sense. So it's a good thing to see that it, it's still there, but there's always going to be a little bit of that. I dunno if we're going to call it friction, but there's a good version of that. There's helpful friction and there's bad friction. But the good friction,

Gordon Campbell ([28:50](#)):

I think it's good. I think it is. We're getting the feedback from the other provinces that, Hey, this doesn't work as well over here as it does where you are. And so it's really good to get that feedback that you have to open up some of these best practices to be more permissive of other areas. And we've had lots of TRS that have kind of stalled while they try to figure that out.

Ed Plant ([29:19](#)):

And I think that process continues. I know as I've come onto the National Best Practices Committee representing Alberta, there's TRS that are proposed. That sound great. It's a good idea. It is a best practice. It gets forwarded. But when somebody with different perspective reads it and looks at it and goes, well, how's that going to be implemented in my area or across Canada? And brings a different perspective, I, it's a worthwhile process because just recently there is some ideas about how to deal with abandoned infrastructure. It sounded good on paper, but it wasn't totally workable across the country. It's being taken back and reworked. It will eventually, I'm sure it'd be part of the best practices, but it's not quite there yet. So when you say friction, Mike, it's maybe a difference of opinion and a different perspective. It's not like Gordon says, it's not a bad thing.

Mike Sullivan ([30:29](#)):

Do you think the days of the CCC, or not C C GA, but I remember seeing the C G A best practice committee, do you think the days of almost coming to blows in the meeting room are over? Because at the very beginning, and I look back to the C C G A, it was that challenging. People were so entrenched. I think those days are over, and that's a good thing. The idea of shared responsibility has certainly umbrellaed over the entire process and the entire Common Ground Alliance movement in Canada, the us And that's a good thing. Before we close off here, I know that Alberta now, because I'm close to it, but the Utility Safety Partner's Best Practices Committee, I believe has quite a high number of transaction requests. It is putting through. Where are we with that, ed?

Ed Plant ([31:19](#)):

We're still in the kind of creation stage. Our focus has been getting the update to the Damage Prevention Process document completed. So we are probably going to be forwarding a bunch of TRS with rationale later this fall.

Mike Sullivan ([31:39](#)):

Great. That's good to hear. And how about for you, Gord? Where does the next version come? It is going to be a dramatic rewrite or just small pushes.

Gordon Campbell ([31:49](#)):

Oh, I think it will be a big change this time around the, oh, during Covid, it's been very slow movement, minor adjustments, nothing really new came along, but the marketing and education committee has been doing a total rewrite of that marketing section. And it was funny that the section didn't even mention the internet or social media, so a total rewrite was necessary. And those trs are working their way through. And I understand from Sher Kirk that the one call section is being revisited, and that hasn't been touched since version one. So it's really good to see these other sections getting a makeover so that we can have a really good document. We spend a lot of time on the locating and excavation sections and they get a thorough workout, but it's really good to see the other committees who have expertise in this come along and provide their input so that we can all be better for

Mike Sullivan ([32:54](#)):

It. No, it's good to hear. I mean, you know, mentioned the One call. Obviously it's what I'm close to and we don't even call ourselves one call anymore, right? We're notification centers and we're far beyond the call today, so that's good to hear. I'm glad to hear that. I'm glad to hear the entire document is getting a major facelift in that regard. Gentlemen, thanks for being on the podcast today. It's always a pleasure to chat with you guys about this. It is a tough subject because it best practices have a bit of a nuance to them. Is that okay? That's great. It's nice to have, but it's not a must have. But if you truly engaged to promote safety and reduce damages and enhanced public worker community safety and the safety of infrastructure, the best practices is an actual absolute must do. It's an absolute must read and implement. So the work you're doing is valuable, and I really appreciate you guys doing that for everybody, not just Utility Safety Partners or Ontario, but for the entire country. Thanks so much. Thank you.

Gordon Campbell ([33:56](#)):

Thank You.

Mike Sullivan ([33:59](#)):

That's going to wrap things up on the podcast. I want to thank our producers Stories and Strategies, and I hope you choose to follow this podcast on any director you're listening on. And please do leave a rating. You can follow us on Twitter at Utility underscore Safety, and we're also on Instagram and Facebook. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, you can email us@infoutilitysafety.ca and please put podcast in the subject header. I'm Mike Sullivan, the president of Utility Safety Partners. One click cost you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.