

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 ([00:18](#)):

My guest today is Mr. Richard Broome. He's the managing director of Line Search Before you Dig from the United Kingdom, Richard is, as somebody said, kind of like the UK version of me or I'm the Alberta version of him. So talking to him was really interesting from my perspective because it's an opportunity to look into the history of the damage prevention process in an area of the world that is a lot older than ours, but also look at the future in terms of how far they've come and how far we need to go. Richard, thank you for joining me on this edition of The Safety Moment. Before we begin, if you don't mind, can you tell us a little about yourself and how you're involved, how you got involved in this role that you're in?

Richard Broome ([01:01](#)):

Yeah, thanks Mike. Now I'm really pleased to join you and take part in this. It's always great to speak to people from all over the world to that do things similar to us and that we do similar to them. So we always jump at the chance to speak where wherever we can. A little bit about me and my role. So I am a chartered surveyor and I got into the industry because the company I work for looked after or still does look after fuel pipelines, oil and fuel pipelines, so high pressure networks. And our role in that is to look after basically the strip of land above it, so the easement corridor and make sure that people knew what to do to be able to work safely around them. And that company started a joint venture, which is they started off with line search, the other party, Pelican Corp had it before you dig and neither party could relinquish their name. So we ended up with a combination of both. Hence Line Search Before You Dig. Yeah. And then I took over the managing director role in that from late 2014. So I've been in there since.

Mike Sullivan ([02:13](#)):

So it's really not that long. You and I have been in our respective roles almost about the same time. I think I'm 2012 in this role that I began. And so now obviously it began with trans, you said transmission pipelines is what was the catalyst for this to get it moving?

Richard Broome ([02:29](#)):

Yeah, originally, so it was so Line Search Before You Dig started before my time. So that was in the early two thousands. But it was started because the guys working for my parent company, Fisher German, were looking after the oil and high pressure fuel pipelines and they were getting the stack of paper back in that time we weren't quite as online as we are now. So early two thousands there were faxes, there were letters, there were emails as well, but the proverbial stack of paper was getting higher. People were emailing in saying, can I work near your assets? And the lady who was dealing with them, Nicola, who's still with us, was amazing at getting through that list. But actually the inbox was getting bigger and bigger as she could go on. So she couldn't cope with it. And I think innovation comes out of necessity sometimes.

([03:23](#)):

Yes, it does. And that's where line search in its original form was born. So I think at that time they were doing 10,000 jobs a year, so it was 10,000 sort of things to check manually. And it was I think probably about four or five years ago we breached the 10,000 searches in a day, which was quite a big milestone

for us in terms of indeed evolution of the service. Oh my God. Yeah, I think we, we've done, we've had probably the one of the biggest numbers we've ever had on average last month, but that was going over 16,000 now. 16,000 per working day

Mike Sullivan ([04:00](#)):

That But is that all utilities or is that only limited to pipelines at the time or is it all utilities now? Oh,

Richard Broome ([04:05](#)):

So sorry. Yeah, back in that day, back in the time that was only those, it was three or four we were looking after and now we don't have everyone but we have 120 different networks across the UK and they range from the big gas distribution, electricity, distribution networks, some water, some telecoms, and then all the other oil and fuel pipeline transmission networks we're aware of. Just in terms of the growth, there seems to be asset owners just growing all the time here the fiber networks are just growing and growing and there seems to be more and more. Yeah, I dunno if that's similar.

Mike Sullivan ([04:38](#)):

Well it is, yeah, I'm really curious about that because you're, the population density where you are compared to where I am is vastly different. And I wanted to ask that question later on, but you're talking about pipelines and that's most of my background is in the pipeline business prior to coming to Alberta One Call and now utility safety partners and Alberta we're kind of like the Texas of Canada, the amount of transmission pipelines we have, the sheer number of kilometers is enormous in the hundreds of thousands of kilometers of pipelines just in this one province. But that's to get the oil and gas to market. And when I look at the governance around that here in Canada federally and even provincially, it's stringent. Is it similar in the UK as well for transmission pipelines or just pipelines in general?

Richard Broome ([05:43](#)):

I suppose it depends when you say it's stringent in respect, Mike.

Mike Sullivan ([05:48](#)):

Well there's obviously in UK they have to be in a legally acquired right of way or easement. And there there's a commissioner in our case the Canada Energy regulator, the Alberta energy regulator that governs those pipelines. So anybody who's working within proximity of those pipelines, whether it's excavation or installing another facility or above ground structures, they have to abide by certain rules and laws, crossing permits, proximity permits, that type thing. I gather it's the same thing in the UK when it comes to pipelines.

Richard Broome ([06:27](#)):

Yeah, I think the fuel pipelines are at the highest end. They're at the furthest point on the scale, the almost, I think all networks, certainly the ones that we look after through our parent company, every bit of work that takes place in the three meters either side and above has to be supervised by one of the operatives. They need advance notice. There's easements across all the private land. The regulation is quite different. It's in terms of the different sectors in our world I suppose in the UK ranging from the telecoms and water, electricity, gas and fuel, a lot of the fuel companies are private operators so they have a slightly different regulatory outlook. But there's things, there's acts such as a pipeline safety

regulations that says all the different requirements on people to make sure that it can't cause harm to a pipeline through their work.

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

Very similar probably language is probably governance I guess there of is quite similar. Is line search before you dig, is that mandated in legislation in the UK or is it voluntary registration only?

Richard Broome ([07:43](#)):

No. So line search before you dig or LSBUD as we shorten it to isn't legislated at all. So there's various bits of legislation about what asset owners need to do. We're proud actually of the success we've got to without any government interference whatsoever. I think legislation's a really tricky one because

Mike Sullivan ([08:07](#)):

I think, well it's extremely tricky.

Richard Broome ([08:09](#)):

It can be so powerful in the right way and for me so that the industry can develop in the best way it can do legislation, regulations should be on the outcomes. So I think it's what we'd love to see is legislation in place to say asset owners need to share it with as wide an audience as possible. And on the flip side that those digging need to make sure they get the information because then I think the industry can come up with the best solution but it incentivizes the asset owners to really value the increase value of sharing data with as wider audience as possible in the appropriate way.

Mike Sullivan ([08:52](#)):

It sounds like in that regard we have a very similar view. I mean I love the idea of legislation, I really do because we've already attracted all that low hanging fruit and even the higher hanging fruit. But the legislation, it ensures that all assets are registered. It ensures that any person conducting a ground disturbance will request to locate at the very minimum and that the asset owners have to respond at the very minimum. Everything after that is a concern because legislation can get locked in time for a decade or more. And as we've seen in just a decade that we've been doing this kind of work, there are so many changes. Technology is moving things at such faster speed than legislation could ever keep up with. And I think you're absolutely right. That's the part that is kind of scary and hat's off to you and everybody who works with you and your members to get to that point where you've been as successful as you are without legislation because that creates a culture of it means there's a culture of safety there and everybody sharing that responsibility and moving towards the same goal.

([10:10](#)):

So I'm glad to hear that because we wrestle with it too. We're undergoing a legislation push right now and as I've told the committee folks that I work with it, you work so hard on the language that you're proposing for legislation, but when you hand that over to the government and they take it, there's no telling what you're going to get back. And so right now we're in that position where we can really dictate how things move forward based on best practices or whatever the case may be. So no, I certainly get that.

Richard Broome ([10:46](#)):

I think the key thing of when you have people that join the service without legislation and sometimes, let's be really honest, we've all been, I'm sure everyone in a sort of one call type operation has been in a situation that they'd love to have legislation to get those either low or high hanging fruits that aren't keen to join for whatever reason, just to say, right guys, you got to. But the good thing is when you've sometimes battled to get these guys on board to help them see the value of doing it, but when you do get them on board and it's gone through that process and they've done it voluntarily, they join because they really want to be there. And like you say, that culture of safety, we've now got people on our sort of strategy and operational boards that are, I don't mean bought in from a financial perspective, but in their heads they're bought into this collaborative thing and they, they're there because they want to be there and they see the value. And that is so powerful because I can't think the best words, but the cul it is just culture. I think that when they're in a room and they want to do the right thing, it's immensely powerful.

Mike Sullivan ([11:54](#)):

Well if you look at going back 50 years where safety, the big umbrella buzzword safety was compared to where it is today and then you look back maybe 35 or 40 years and environmental stewardship was what it is then it was, and compared to what it is now, I think finally the damage prevention culture is undergoing that same trajectory where we're at that point, I believe in time where utility owners, they get it. The digging community gets it. We need to do things, we need to preserve the integrity of the buried assets and in doing so, we're protecting public worker and community safety. And I don't know if I am seeing that because I want to see it or if I'm seeing it because it's actually there. But I think and I hope it's the latter.

Richard Broome ([12:51](#)):

Yeah, it's so hard to understand that isn't it, because we look at what you guys do and what they do and in the C C G A and the C G A and those types of organizations in terms of damage reporting and we really aspire to be as good as you guys in terms of getting those damages reported because if you report them, you understand them, but then you can have more awareness leads to more reporting. And so sometimes yes, actually more awareness of the issues is a better thing, but actually the stats make it look worse.

([13:30](#)):

But I think that understanding, it's very hard to be objective when you're involved in this industry because it could be changed by what a few people say at a conference or what some of your members say. It's extremely hard to be absolutely measured on the state of the industry, especially when you're dealing with so many people. You're dealing with a whole country really anyone in this country and in your country and any other country in the world can go out there and put a spade in the ground and hit something and you are just trying to steal a bit of their time to say please, but you are right. Almost always not the first thing on their minds because we, we've touched on it before, but the pressures of fiber rollout or it might be in over here, the water company's not having leaks or it could be the electricity companies not having downtime.

([14:29](#)):

And we've talking about the last 10, 20 years, the idea of a power cut over here is almost unheard of. Now there's so few and I can't remember the exact stats, but, and that resilience and that desire for customer service is fantastic for the consumer, but when it goes down, the supply chain can potentially lead to things being oversized. So the water's gushing out and you've got to stop the leak. So do you

work in the right possible way? And so yes, there's that awareness, the greater awareness of safety, but then there's also greater awareness of customer service and getting things done quickly. Sometimes those two things can be a bit abrasive. They can, the rub bucket ends each other and not lead to the best result.

Mike Sullivan ([15:20](#)):

How many locate requests do you process every year?

Richard Broome ([15:24](#)):

So it, it's slightly different in the UK. So whereas you guys will go out and locate all the assets for all the members will locate them or arrange for someone to do it, we actually, we provide them the mapping to the third party so they're then responsible to locate. So although it's not a locate request, it's very similar. It's just really a GIS data plan of where the assets are for them to be able to locate and confirm on site. So we had a record year last year, so three and three quarter million inquiries last year. Wow.

Mike Sullivan ([16:01](#)):

So we're getting close to 4 million,

Richard Broome ([16:04](#)):

4 million searches. And then you multiply that up by the number of plans that go out and it gets to quite a big number because each inquiry has multiple members on, as I'm sure you have with your operations,

Mike Sullivan ([16:18](#)):

The number of, sorry. So you're getting three point, no, no, 300, 3 million, seven 50,000 locate requests. We'll call them that because that's the lingo that we use here. But the vast majority is of those requests for or somebody's digging. So it initiates or triggers the system. The process are coming in over the web, right? I mean this is all the va, I mean nobody's calling, I don't think

Richard Broome ([16:49](#)):

We have under 10 a year. So we have occasionally and we normally know if we're all in the office together, we know because the problem, I suppose the issue is that the people get the responses back via email. So they've got to have internet access of some sort and that's how it's set up. We did enable an offering via post, but no one took it up. So it was everything. Everyone comes back by email. So you've it. We normally have to talk someone through it if they're struggling, but it's better that they do that themselves. Cause again, they're more bought into it. I think getting the area, getting the options and understanding the issues and whatnot. And then it makes more sense to them when they get the responses back. But occasionally when our guys, I think we have normally out of about 15 or 16,000 searches per day, we have about 10 calls, which is how do I use a site or something like that. So very limited and of those very small percentage end up with us doing it on their behalf as we sort of talk it through. But I think it's two or three. Yeah, that's the sort of number. It's absolutely tiny. So we tend to remember them when they happen.

Mike Sullivan ([18:06](#)):

I'm laughing because I mean it's phenomenal. First of all, it's phenomenal, but I'm kind of laughing here because I mean less than 10 a day and then less, sorry, a couple of year that you're actually doing

yourself. That's incredible. And you're receiving, this is an instance of approaching 4 million excavations or ground disturbances that are triggering the system every year. That is absolutely phenomenal. How did you get there? I mean the web has been around for a while now, but how did you actually get there? Was it just a organic or it just happened over time or was it an something that, a goal that you wanted to achieve that we we've got to get this over to the web?

Richard Broome ([18:49](#)):

Yeah, it's a great question. I think the simple answer is we got there because we started there, it's only ever been an online service. Oh good. Yeah. As we've got more people coming on board, they've done things that are offline, they've had customer calls and then they've sent things out via post. But honestly over time that's just dissipated. And the requirement for that is significantly reduced to zero there. I mean are it, we shouldn't globally say that it's possible for everyone. There are people that can't access the internet and what we don't want is any barrier for safe digging. The difficulty is that understanding a way of getting to those people. So we focus on accessibility on our website and put different languages on and all those sorts of things, which is in accordance with our mantra of safe digging for all. But for those guys that can't do that, we will try and help them as best can. Our processes for all our members is online only. And so I can't remember the last time someone said that they haven't got internet access or can't work with someone. But we always try and help them as best we can. Cause the last thing we want is for that very small percentage of people that can't get access, whether it's in the local library or whatever or whatnot. But we don't want someone that can't get access then going out and hurting themselves. So we'll always try and help wherever we can.

Mike Sullivan ([20:22](#)):

What are you doing February 26th through 28th? 2024. If you have no plans, mark it in your calendar. Utility Safety Partners is celebrating its 40th anniversary serving the damage prevention process to Albertans and outside Alberta. We're going to be celebrating our anniversary with a safety conference at the Beautiful Banff Springs Hotel in Banff Alberta, February 26th through 28th, 2024.

([20:57](#)):

We're somewhat in the same boat. We mandated locate requests for our members and contractors to the web a couple of years ago and we did a soft launch. They were very close, they're in the high eighties anyway, percentile. But there were just some that just didn't want to for habit reasons or whatever the case may be. But when we realized that web requests were less likely to result in damage than a locate request with a phone, the board members mandated that they agreed that we needed to mandate that for the digging community and our members, homeowners, landowners, it's a slower role, but they only dig once every 10 years. Maybe you're once in a lifetime. So it's a little different. We aren't mandating that, but we are seeing that constant increase of web requests with our homeowners category. We don't have anywhere near the same number of locate requests, nor do we have the same population obviously or density.

([21:59](#)):

But shifting to the web has been an absolute necessity in terms of it's a best practice. And so when I hear somebody like yourself saying, yeah, we have 3.7 million transactions or however you want to call it, happening every year and it's all on the web and then you're there to assist people to put their locate request through on the web, that's exactly what we've, we are doing now in our agents have transitioned to do predominantly that, whether it's chat or online assistances, wherever the case may

be. And that is, it just changed the way they work, changed the way we work. So that's impressive. I'm curious though, how many members, so owners of Buried Assets are registered with you?

Richard Broome ([22:53](#)):

So it's changes but it's between 120 and hundred 30. So what we started was for, and that was back in the early two thousands and they were transmission networks this so very high consequence of damage. If you hit one of those, it's running a hundred bar or I can't remember what that is in psi, but it's about 30 times what a car tire is if that helps sort of translate. So they're not in very many areas, but high consequence and the challenge for us over time, especially in the last five or six years, it's been getting the distribution networks on board. So they're the ones which have the, I'm sure the same over with you guys, the small diameter amateur stuff, the small gas pipes or electricity cables go into people's houses and covering hundreds of thousands of kilometers of network. So I think in the last five years, certainly since be probably six now six years, we'll have doubled if not a bit more than the volume of the length of networks on our site. So it's now over a million kilometers of network and it's hard to measure the telecoms networks. They're slightly different cause all the different fibers and ducks and whatnot. But yeah, well over a million kilometers it's not absolutely everything that's out there, there's a lot of networks still to protect. So we're trying our best to get the water companies are probably the biggest users of the service but are protect the least likely to protect the networks at the moment. So that's a challenge for us.

Mike Sullivan ([24:39](#)):

How do you promote mean, actually before I ask that question, do you overhead utilities, are they registered with you as well or no, you have no governance or they are Okay.

Richard Broome ([24:50](#)):

Yeah, the owners of the overhead are often the same as the ones that have the underground as well. We treat them as the same because from a design perspective, if someone's taking excavators to site or whatever, they need to know what's above the ground as well as underground. And sometimes they're connected. So it's all relevant to us. It's not just underground stuff.

Mike Sullivan ([25:14](#)):

Has that reduced the amount of contacts with overhead assets?

Richard Broome ([25:18](#)):

Good question that, I dunno the answers to Mike if I'm honest. So I think the biggest risk or the most likely risk or the one that causes most damage is farming operations in the summer. So whether it be bail stacking or similar that tend or spray arms, that's difficult because for us that would be something that is, wouldn't require an inquiry because we are talking about normally ground disturbance, whether it be fence all the way from a main excavation to putting in a fence post anything that disturbs the ground. Whereas as I understand it, most of the damages to overheads are done by either we call them high abs, the arms on a tip truck. So a high agricultural operation that wouldn't necessarily cause or require an excavation request.

Mike Sullivan ([26:14](#)):

And we're seeing the similar here. I mean as I believe you're aware, we unified recently and with the Alberta Common Ground Alliance and the wears align program, which was the awareness and protection of overhead utilities assets. And that's why we became utility safety partners and there's been a lot of work to promote awareness of overhead utilities and how to work in safely near them. And we've incorporated that into our education awareness. How do you promote awareness of the system and how do you educate the public of what to do before they dig?

Richard Broome ([26:51](#)):

It's a great question. I think it's multifaceted. So our head of marketing would jump on this question Mike, and should be much better at answering it than I will be. But the key things are the best sort of bang for our buck so to speak, is for the members to direct all their people that they're aware of their networks to us. Because if each one does that, when one person does it 119 or 120 or whatever it is benefit. So every time someone does that, that's the best way for this collaborative thing to work. Aside of that, we do sort of PR campaigns looked last year and we've got articles into industry papers, industry magazines such as water networks and utility networks. But then it goes to things like Drain Trader and Potato Grower or Potato Review I think it was, and farming contracting magazines and all those sorts of things.

[\(27:51\)](#):

So you never quite know where that press article or things like this are podcasts that we, we've been involved in. So getting into so many different setting cause it's so difficult to get to everyone and make it a priority. One thing that we've done recently was, I dunno whether you saw it, but there was a video caught on camera or on a house's CCTV camera and it was a fencing operator that was putting into a stock fence and it was using a thing called a rock spike to sort of pilot a hole, but it was in rocky ground. So he had a fencing rig, put the pilot rocks pipe in, hit it down and unbeknown to him, I think it was a cast iron from memory, but a medium pressure gas pipeline underneath and it ruptured blew him and the machine away and all this.

[\(28:54\)](#):

Thankfully he wasn't hurt and no, thankfully no one was hurt. There was obviously there was a lot of work to do to put the pipe and a big risk. But the really good thing about that is he contacted us through an article that he'd seen in one in a fencing mag magazines that one of my colleagues had done, contacted us and said I want to make a safety video. And so we've now partnered with him and put that out to all the online, it's on YouTube so it's open to anyone, but it's targeted at those people such as fences that wouldn't necessarily think of underground utilities when they go to work. So I know it's a long rambling answer to the question Mike, but I'm sure it's the same with you that there's just so much you do and national campaigns, social media, traditional events, there's so much that you can do and just try but try and focus on key things is what we try and do is focus on an area of the industry or a theme for the year to make it interesting and hopefully get some buy-in.

Mike Sullivan ([29:58](#)):

Absolutely right. It's hard to determine the effectiveness of an education campaign. It's really hard. And one of the things we do is we do have an assessment of effectiveness form that we fill out after every engagement and to try and determine what the reach was and is. It's something we can improve upon the following year, whether that's a contractor breakfast or something else we've done. But you're absolutely right, it is very challenging and especially in a province where we are, as I mentioned earlier, there's so many brewer utilities, that means we have so many partners and safety that are actually

promoting as well. So how much of a difference is our promotion making? It's hard to tell. But then again, if we did nothing, it would be something else. Are we actually making a difference if we're not doing anything? So it's really hard to determine. What are some of the most significant challenges you've faced in your role? And I know I'm departing from our conversation here, but in our roles there's going to be challenges and what are some of the things that you find the most difficult or the most maybe the greatest success you've had as well?

Richard Broome ([31:13](#)):

I think the biggest challenges are when you really strongly believe in what you do, but you can't get the other person to understand it as well as you do. And you can't get that message across because it's massively frustrating when you, you're so passionate about what you do and it's just not on their radar or they've relied on different information or maybe some intransigence on their side, maybe some, it might be poor communication on our side, but whatever it is when is, particularly when you're trying to get new asset owners on the service, and I remember there's one company in particular that's still not joined, it's one of those ones that we'll keep on chipping away at, but they said, oh, we get all the inquiries anyway. And I said, honestly, I don't think you do. I think, we'll, pretty darn sure it's a really difficult thing.

([32:12](#)):

So you want to come across as confident but not arrogant because it's a personal relationship, but almost said, I bet you a drink, drink that we, we'd have more or something similar, just a lighthearted one. But eventually they went through all the process of an NDA and undisclosed agreement to share each other's inquiries. We did all the analysis and we showed them ours. It was in November 19, it was in an area of the UK and they said, you choose the area and we'll show you. And so they gave us their inquiries, we gave 'em theirs and we gave 'em ours. And we had 47% more domains and 47% more people. And I can't remember what it was, I think it was 30% more inquiries. So quite a significant number. And this was a well-known company and they just said, yeah, but we're not sure what the benefit that is.

([33:13](#)):

And we kind of went then, I think it was a similar occasion as well, we went to see them and they went to see one of their senior directors and they said, oh, we don't have a problem with damage. We said, I just don't understand how you can't have a problem with damage. And they said, well, every time someone damages it, well we get 90% of where it's been damaged and we get 90% of the cost back. And I said, I just can't believe that. I mean it's amazing. And again, you don't want to say to someone that you, you're talking to that I don't believe you or you try and find a very nice way of saying it. And we went to speak to what I said, do you mind if I speak to your damaged French and team? And they said, yeah, that's absolutely fine.

([33:58](#)):

Went to see them. I said, so how would you get this information when something's been damaged? And they said, okay, well here's the form. Question number one, do you know who's damaged this? If yes, continue. If no, do not report. And so actually what this, and so it was just get on with the repair dam business as usual. So this director was looking at a set of data that he didn't realize but was totally wrong because he was only seeing the ones where they knew the contact and had the phone number as well. And that again, trying to put that across to him to say with respect, it's not what you think it is, it's his response back. And the words sort of ring true or echo about it in my head anyways, that it doesn't keep me up at night. And it just frustrates us that you kind of go back to your comment about a better

sense of safety and a better thing of doing the right thing for customers and all those sorts of things that actually, you know, see these companies that talk about esg. So environmental social governance and doing the right thing for community, how whatever acronym you have and you go actually helping people stop hitting your networks even if it doesn't cause you too much pain, it's going to cause them pain. Whether that's physical harm or financial pain or delays or whatever it is. Just please help you do the right thing. I suppose to me is the biggest frustration,

Mike Sullivan ([35:31](#)):

Do the right thing, right? I mean it doesn't take much, just do the right thing. It sounds like that's a party that is, whether it's in the corporate culture there or whatever, that now we're going to look at it this way and we're going to design our data to support the way we want things to look. And that that's culture, that line of thought is out there and we, we've seen it too. I can think of one buried asset owner here, not just in Alberta but in Canada that has just chosen not to register unless they're forced to by legislation. And it doesn't make any sense to me, but it's really hard to, or very difficult I should say, to convey a message that is so logical and yet the decision not to go through with what registering their data is illogical, but it can't explain.

([36:29](#)):

It's so obvious that they can't do it. Now from a comparison, the UK and Canada, the UK is old, your history goes back a long ways compared to Canada and here in Alberta particularly, we're just over a hundred years old in terms of being modern and having the population that we do. When I first moved to Calgary and I walked downtown, I thought, wow, they built this last night compared to where I grew up. I grew up in Montreal where it was 350 years old and you come here and wow, everything's shiny and new. If you could see into Canada's future and where you are now and where do you think Canada will be in a hundred years in terms of the damage prevention process and where you are today and looking at the assets and the population density, the age of municipalities and where you have assets, where do you think Canada might be in a hundred years? We won't be around so we can say anything we want.

Richard Broome ([37:43](#)):

Yeah, quite. I mean think there's so much to consider in that question. I think yes, we're old, yes, we've got lots of stuff on the ground. Do we get everything right? Certainly not. And actually does the age or our history help us get it more right Or does it hinder us? And I think there's so much to consider. So I think is it, whether you're in the UK or Canada, expectations just continually increase. And I heard a really good guy who's a director at one of our members at UK Power Networks and he said they don't compete with another electricity network, they don't actually compete with Amazon, they compete with the guys who's an eBay seller that does it in their garage and will respond to you at seven o'clock at night and get it posted next morning. So I think, which I thought was really interesting, he'd come from a management consultancy background and I thought was a really refreshing way for an asset owner to talk.

([38:46](#)):

So I think you could say for both UK and Canada, expectations are going to continue to rise. You know, only know that from when we used to send a letter and you had a bit of grace to read it and a lot more grace to write back. Now if you haven't had a reply to an email in an hour or two, you're thinking what are they up to? So I think expectations are going to rise. I think in terms with that, I think there's, who knows how that will affect utilities. I think on things like the telecoms and fiber networks, we are seeing

so much stuff go in the ground so much. And annoyingly Mike, from a damage prevention perspective, it's going in narrow trenching. So it's going in at the very top layer. Some of it's in the black stuff, which is, to be honest, it's just infuriating because we're just leaving a sort of ticking time bomb there for forever.

[\(39:39\)](#):

I think we're doing that because we're really congested and I haven't got it to hand, but there's a really good slide that that's there that shows a London Street and you've seen these all over the world, but all the pipe skinned cables going in across the street and basically the last bit going in the final gap, whether or not that can go across the air. We've seen Mr. Musk and the offer offerings from sort of satellite broadband, which who knows, that could be around in 10 years time. It could be widespread in 10 years time, nevermind a hundred. But you're all, I think I struggle to see how even with the sort of futuristic hat on how and water's going to stay coming through the pipes, I can't see any other way of that. I think electricity, you're going to struggle to do anything different on that.

[\(40:31\)](#):

So although you think a hundred euros is massively futuristic, particularly thinking back to 1923, actually I think some of our industry might stay quite similar. Yes, there might be robots digging holes or traveling down pipes and repairing as they are now, but there's certain things that will stay the same I think in a hundred years. And I think there'll still be certain challenges about issues around road use. I mean, who knows, we might be in flying cars so we won't have to worry about the road or the highway and holding people up. But I think in a hundred years time, I don't see that there being a major difference between the UK and Canada. Just more expectations. So potentially more in the ground stuff that that's in the ground will stay in the ground and continue to be needed on the same way as water coming in. I can't see the sewage coming out being anything other than viral pipe in a fairly grim way of looking at it. But yeah, so there's lots of things that will stay in there that won't change, I don't see anyway. What about you Mike? How do you see it?

Mike Sullivan [\(41:39\)](#):

I asked the question and it's a good question I think cause I have a hard time answering as well. I think where we are right now and how we manage locate requests, how we process them, I think it'll just be no manual process whatsoever. It'll just be a one big database of assets. And with artificial intelligence where we are right now, we look ahead a hundred years or even 10 years, 20 years, it will be able to respond to a locate request based on historical data and whether where the person's digging, what kind of assets there that are in place, what permits are required if necessary, whether it's a legal requirement to do so, if they're crossing a legal right of way, whatever it might be, all of that is going to be managed online. And by artificial intelligence, I do see that we're potentially even close closer to that than we think, I think. But in terms of preventing damage, I think we're going to get better. I think we're getting better right now.

[\(42:51\)](#):

The online, the proliferation of online locate requests here in Alberta, we've seen a reduction in damages and full stop. That's good. We need to keep going that way individually. It's interesting because nobody has all the answers individually, we just don't have the answers. But when we work collectively and exactly what we're doing right here, like we do with the Canadian Common Ground Alliance or our own conferences, there's now the Facility Notifications Association, F N C A and of like-minded individuals like ourselves working towards a common goal to reduce damages from the one call perspective or the notification center perspective. Those organizations create that ability because you

have so many people that are working collectively and they will be successful individually. We have our limitations collectively. There's nothing we can't accomplish. And the more we do that, the more we do exactly this today, speaking across pond as you said, then I think we'll get there. I really do think we're going to see a greater reduction in damages. I think we're going to get there faster than we have in the past, and it's going to be based on technology, plain and simple. I hate to say that the more you take people out of the process, the better things will be. But we're prone to error because there's just so many things going on, whereas artificial intelligence over time will improve and the likelihoods of damage will diminish.

Richard Broome ([44:31](#)):

I think you took absolutely right. I mean think you can only see how the chat GPT stuff in the last six months, never mind the last few years. It's just scary how quick it's, it's just, yeah, amazing. I mean, yeah, I suppose the only thing I'd say is I would say a lot of that you could achieve in the next 10 years rather than a hundred because I think the automation in those things, just seeing what's developed over the last 10 years in terms of risk scoring and automation in our industry, I think you could probably achieve them in less than a hundred years. Let's hope that, but I think it's it. Oh yeah. Who knows whether we're even going to be digging holes in a hundred years. I think we probably will be, but probably fewer I would hope.

Mike Sullivan ([45:25](#)):

I agree. I think things are going to be very different. I mean even the machinery digging holes, it'll be unmanned. There'll be no person that's going to be operating that you'll be programmed. And I don't know what we're all going to do, but maybe we're all going to be enjoying life and not having to work. I have no idea. But I guess we'll find out or our ancestors who are coming down the line will find out for us. We won't be around to find out. Richard, thanks for joining me today. I really appreciate this. And I also want to extend an invitation to you to come to our 40th anniversary and safety conference, which will be happening February 26th through 28, 2024. And it'll be in at the Banff Springs Hotel in beautiful Banff Alberta that time of the year. We could have plus 17 degrees, we could have minus 30 degrees. We really don't know. But it's a beautiful place in the world and we're very proud of to be here and in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. If you've never been, it's a great opportunity to come. If you do come, I guarantee we'll put you to work. So we'll have you speaking and be part of the whole celebration. So I do hope I'll see you then and if not, maybe sooner, somewhere over the next number of months. But again, thanks for joining me today. I really appreciate it.

Richard Broome ([46:53](#)):

Really, really enjoyed it. Mike. Thanks very much and I'd love to see you soon. So sit, we'll certainly see you if we can get across.

Mike Sullivan ([47:01](#)):

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 device or directory 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, please email us at info@utilitysafety.ca and put podcast in the subject. And if you have an episode idea, send that along too. I'm Mike Sullivan, the president of Utility Safety Partners. And remember, one click costs you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.