

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 ([00:17](#)):

Hi everybody, and thanks for joining me on the podcast today. My guest is Mr. Ron Laidman. He is the president and CEO and Chief Cook and bottle washer for Enertia. It's his own contracting company and Ron has been helping Utility Safety Partners with the rollout of our alternate locate provider program.

([00:36](#)):

Hey Ron, thanks for joining the podcast today. Just talking to our producer and it's been a while since we've actually had a chance to have a guest and actually do some recording, so it's nice to get back on air and very glad to have you here. This is an opportune time to talk about the alternate locate provider that Utility Safety Partners has been working on for the better part of two years, maybe even three years now that I come to think about it. And we're almost ready to unveil this for the masses and it's a big change in Alberta, but this is something that you're not completely unfamiliar with, but we'll get to that. We'll get to that Ron. So Ron Laidman, who is Ron Laidman, who is the guy that is working with Utility Safety Partners now to help us navigate these last steps. Tell me about yourself. You're an engineer. I am. And you've been in the locating and marketing industry for a while, but how did you get there? What makes Ron Laidman tick?

Ron Laidman ([01:35](#)):

Well, I took the regular path that most people take to locating and I started out in the pharmaceutical industry, so that was where I first started out and after university, after engineering, take whatever job that comes to you. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([01:52](#)):

I've been there. Yeah, so

Ron Laidman ([01:53](#)):

I did that for many years. I have pharmaceutical equipment, sales and integrations and things like that and did my MBA during that time and then switched gears after the MBA was done and got into the energy industry and that's really what set me on the path towards locating without me even knowing it at that point. So yeah, I worked for a company called Shawcor, which was a large multinational energy infrastructure service company. They're called matter now. They just rebranded. And so I did various roles in Toronto and also Edmonton. I lived out there for almost five years, just various roles, market development and general management, acquisitions, things like that. And then I came back to Ontario and that's when I started working for a company called OEC who run two of the largest locate service providers in Canada, PBS and G Tel. And that's really where the introduction to locating came and geospatial and engineering and infrastructure as we know it right now. So it's been since that time I've been going along and learning more about locates and it's been my life for the last little while in addition to engineering construction and the energy industry in general. So

Mike Sullivan ([03:12](#)):

Have you been more on the, let's call it the more the academic side of locating marketing or have you done the boots on the ground experience?

Ron Laidman ([03:19](#)):

I have not other than going out to see stuff in the field and obviously working with the teams. So I was more from a leadership perspective, I was overseeing the process and ensuring we had the resources in place and the people and the equipment and the financials and everything that went into that. Obviously from an operational perspective, quality and safety and everything that was all part of the oversight and all part of that. So a lot of what I've been working with you on and with many people in the industry is around that formal side of things and how to implement things and put some structure around. Locating traditionally not been maybe the most structured industry as well. Well,

Mike Sullivan ([04:01](#)):

It's an interesting point actually. And speaking with some of my members of distribution assets more. So a lot has changed in the, we'll call it the one call slash notification center industry. Over the last five to 10 years, there's been a lot of changes and we've been a big part of those changes on the software side, the ticket processing, ticket taking if you will, side of things. But not a lot has changed really with locating a marketing. Maybe the equipment's gotten better, there's been some enhancements over the years, but really the actual process of locating and marketing, it hasn't changed in a very long time. And this is probably the biggest change in a sense.

Ron Laidman ([04:43](#)):

Yeah, and it's interesting. You never know the path you're on too, because when I worked at Shawcor, we actually inspected pipe and things and it was the same technique. You induce a signal on there and to locate errors or anything else in the pipe, same thing you're doing in locating, you're inducing a signal underground and it's all the same technology that's been used since the beginning. So in terms of process, a lot of what we're talking about is this is a step change now what we're talking about with a LP and other changes, I'd say the biggest change I've seen has been from the geospatial standpoint and from the records standpoint. And it's something that I've seen more movement in the last few years than maybe I had the entire time before that in the industry as well. So that's another way that the industry is moving as well in terms of the records, in terms of updating the records and keeping things up to speed.

Mike Sullivan ([05:41](#)):

And that's really just part of where we are today with the ability for records management through electronic means. I mean, we're just there. That's just the expectation. If you're not doing that, you're going to get left behind. That's interesting. That's good to know. But the actual physical locating and marking it really hasn't changed in a long time. You mentioned that when you're with Shawcor for detecting anomalies, I take it in the metallurgy, whatever, that hasn't changed and we're still there, but what we're seeing now, and we've seen it in Ontario and we're getting ready to roll this out in Alberta, is we're shifting the, or not really shifting, we're providing the professional digging community with the option to manage the locates themselves. So if they follow a process and they become accredited, if you will, or registered, they go through all those hoops that they have to go through, they can now get the locates done themselves and it will expedite the process and what has happened.

([06:50](#)):

And before we even get there, why are we doing this? I mean there's been some precursors to this, but in Alberta for many years we've had consortiums and the consortium of what we affectionately call the shallow utilities. Now these shallow utilities are the distribution assets, telecommunications and gas and

electricity that are typically on almost every ticket, especially in urban areas, they are on every ticket. And rather than sending multiple locators out to locate those assets, the consortium sends one, the consortium creates a contract or secures a contract with the locate service provider, the LSP, and that contractor will locate all those utilities on behalf of that consortium. Great idea. It expedites a process. You're not waiting for multiple locators if you're the excavator. But it also created, which was never anticipated, I don't think it created an artificial bottleneck because now you're limiting the locates to a certain number of contract locate service providers, LSPs, when in a place like Alberta, there are a lot of locators.

[\(08:05\)](#):

Capacity for locating is actually quite good, but the consortiums had created this artificial bottleneck and the result is when you jam seven, or sorry a year's worth of construction, at seven or eight months you have locate delays. And due to our climate here or not, they like today, it's great. We have a Chinook here and it's an El Nino year. It's a very easy winter. They're not all like this and we can't be digging in December or January the way we normally would. So we jam years of the construction to that time span, we have locate delays and that ends up costing the digging community a lot of money for mobilization demobilization. And so here we are today, we are getting ready to roll out this alternate locate provider process or program where the digging community can secure their own locates and pay for it themselves. And this has been a long time coming. We mentioned at the top of the call that this has been going on since, well, since about two and a half years almost as we've been working towards this. But this is not the only province that's gone here and this is where I'm getting to here in this long soliloquy. Before we

Ron Laidman [\(09:23\)](#):

Talk, I wonder where you're going

Mike Sullivan [\(09:24\)](#):

Or what you're doing, but I mean you've been part of this process in Ontario, but Ontario had to act very fast. I mean, a change in legislation came and if I'm not mistaken, it was something like 30 or 60 days that they had to get going on this and it was being imposed on them. So how did that affect the industry there?

Ron Laidman [\(09:46\)](#):

And again, the changes in Ontario where there's always been a one call act, there's always been regulation mandating the use of one call for this. So it is slightly different than Alberta, but you're right, there was a lot of noise. And then there was the push in the government to build for the building broadband faster act, which was promoting ways to get broadband built across the entire province. And then that led to an act and a bunch of committees and all sorts of things that I was a part of actually and led to consultation and some very quick changes in early 2022 is when all that stuff actually went into place. And then like that, you're right, within a couple months it was being implemented and then some further changes in 2023 happened as well. Just some incremental changes to more formalize some of the process.

[\(10:41\)](#):

So every time there was a change, it was very fast, which led to a lot of confusion, which led to some concerns and some backtracking in some cases and some standing the ground. In other cases, what it led to more than anything is I think there was a push, there was a formalization to increase capacity

then in the industry. So it did help some of the larger companies increase capacity out there and a path for them to do that, but it meant to bring in more diversity into the entire market. And it hasn't fully done that yet right now because there are still some bottlenecks in the process. And because everything was done so fast, it wasn't done in a way that removed those bottlenecks or provided a path or a framework to get past those bottlenecks that exist. So the idea has been really good. It's been working to a certain degree, but it's not working quite to the degree that I think anyone expected. And part of that is the blunt force or the blunt approach of a government mandate too in that case.

Mike Sullivan ([11:46](#)):

Well, I mean the government's there to help and in this case, they truly were. And in fact, I was consulted, the government of Ontario reached out to me a number of times over the last couple of years saying, asking questions about how locates were managed in Alberta. And we saw this happening. I mean we being Alberta, we saw this happening in Ontario and it was really ATCO Gas and a couple of others that said, we got to get ahead of this. If we don't do something ourselves, this is going to be imposed on us and we may not have time to react. We may not have time to implement something that's going to work and we're going to be able to live with. So here we are two and a half years later, and there's been a lot of effort on this and had some excellent resources and subject matter experts that have contributed to the development of a training standard now as tech and global training, they have combined their resources to create the first training program for the locating and marking, and that'll be rolled out very soon.

([12:54](#)):

They have to go through the audit process and then we're ready to go with that. But there's more to it than that. There's lots more to it. You don't just take the course and you're ready to locate. And this is really where you come in. Now before we go there, at some point along the line in your career you decided, you know what? I think there's a demand. I'm going to hang my own shingle. Tell me about that because I think you're a limited commodity. I don't think there's a lot of Ron Laidman like capacity out there. And so tell me about that a little bit.

Ron Laidman ([13:26](#)):

Yeah, that's a good little, I dunno if it's a great story, but I was working at Telecon at the time at promark, which we didn't really touch on during my history. And I was actually heavily involved in the dedicated locating in Ontario rollout for that program. And I saw all the changes that were being talked about, a lot of the quick implementation and many of the things that were being asked for and some of the gaps that existed out there. And I actually saw a need on the market for some formality around this, some support. And to your point, there's not a whole lot of people like me. I don't know if that's good or bad, but there's not a whole lot of people out there

Mike Sullivan ([14:10](#)):

Right now. I

Ron Laidman ([14:10](#)):

See. It's good for you anyway with that sort of experience. So again, I've always been sort of entrepreneurial, even though I've worked for large companies for most of my career, but it was a good opportunity. I saw a need out there and I said, let's do this. I got young kids, I've got a spouse with a

demanding career. Let's just go now's the time to do it and see if we can make it work. So that's the story right there.

Mike Sullivan ([14:37](#)):

Yeah, well it's interesting that you recognize that because not everybody does there people who may recognize, well, it's not me, I think it's not going to be me. I'm not going to do that. But yeah, I think you're right. And from my exposure in this area too, and I am not a locator. I've never done any locating or anything like that. I mean, I've been around it. I could tell you exactly how it's supposed to work. I could tell you the legislation that exists, whether it's transmission pipelines or whatever, but have I done any locating? No, I have not. And I'd be hard pressed to tell you which end of the locator to hold onto when you're out in the field. So that's my experience. But to recognize the need that these changes are coming fast and furious in Ontario at the time, and now they're coming fast and furious in Alberta to recognize that there are contacts out there that are going to have to manage this process from A to Z.

([15:34](#)):

Somebody needs to hold their hand. I'm going to be that guy. And I think that's exactly what happened. You became that guy. And then when we connected a while back, I saw the need that we were approaching the end of our contract with the project managers. We were approaching the end of the training, standard development, and then we're going to move into the next phase where the locate service providers are going to take the training and they're going to have to go through these other hoops. And this is where you come in and now we have a contract that you are contracted to utility safety partners to bring us to the end of this next phase and then we move into the next one. Now, in a brief explanation, maybe you can provide, what are those other hoops? I mean, you take the training, it's like getting your driver's license. Well, I've gone through the training and I've got my driver's license. Can you drive? Not yet, not in your own car anyway. You can drive your mom and dad's car, but not yet. So how does this process going to work? What are the assessment protocols going beyond the training?

Ron Laidman ([16:44](#)):

Yeah, and the training you're talking about too is at the locator level too. So we have two components of this program. We have the locator level and the locate service provider level. So in a nutshell, what we're planning to do with this program is to provide a registration and assessment avenue for locate service providers, any locate service provider or contractor that's looking to do locating, providing a framework that they can be assessed against that's aligned, that the industry is aligned behind, that the consortium members and USP is behind that we can use as the basis to assess anyone that wants to participate in this program. So it's a large assessment documented program, and I won't get into all that today, but it's consistent. It's something that we can use against any company that wants to come in. And then once those companies are approved and registered, we then empower them to ensure that their locators are able to work on this program and meeting the level that we're expecting. And part of that is the training programs that we just talked about too. So really there's a couple different levels here too, and I think it's going to provide a much clearer and more responsive way for folks to get involved in this industry. And it's going to increase capacity pretty quickly for those that want to get involved out there.

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

Agility Safety Partners, alternate locate provider program is a new feature that we are offering very soon. The feature allows the digging community to secure locates through their own means, and you

can find all the information you need to know on our website. Just go to utility.safety.ca, then click on learning centre and ALP program. FAQ Q.

[\(18:50\)](#):

What we anticipate or what is anticipated is again, going back to what I said before, that this will begin to alleviate the bottleneck. Is it going to be an overnight success? Are we going to see locate delays diminished down to nothing the next day? Of course not. That's not going to happen. This is going to take over I think by maybe 12, 18, 24 months, and then we'll be having a different conversation than we are today. We're going to evolve. I think what we're doing, we're getting ready to roll out in the next couple of weeks is going to look a little bit different a year or two years from now. I have no doubt because we're going to be learning as we go and we have to be nimble, we have to be flexible to those things, but we can be when there isn't any legislation around it.

[\(19:40\)](#):

And that's the beauty of this is we can be, and collectively not just utility safety partners and the training standards committee deciding this is how it's going to work, but collectively with the digging community, those subject matter experts as well with the utility owners, those subject matter experts, that's the beauty of this. This was all designed with all of those minds and experience around it. It wasn't a bureaucrat saying, it's going to look like this. Good luck. That's not what's going to happen. And in parallel, we are, we utility safety partners, we are going down that legislative path and this is a feather in our cap. I truly believe that, that we are being able to see around corners and say, if we secure legislation, we need to have this buttoned up. We need to have a process that is, it may not be defined yet, but this is working.

[\(20:35\)](#):

And it shows that we are consulting with not only the utility owners but the users, the heavy users. And that is predominantly when we're talking in shallow utilities, the road builders, and they have seen this, they, they've talked about it, we've talked to 'em about, I should say, and they highly anticipate the rollout of this. They, I believe will be the road builders I believe will be some of highest benefiting group of contractors out there. What have you seen in Ontario since the, and maybe we haven't really talked about a lot, but Ontario, the legislation, yes, we talked about that and the change building broadband faster, but there was Ontario one call rolled out the designated locator program and how has that benefit the industry? What's your experience there?

Ron Laidman [\(21:29\)](#):

So it's offered a more formal path for other companies to get involved. So there has been some benefit there. I was just looking at the numbers actually recently, and what has happened actually is compliance and delivery of locates has improved across the board. So not just on dedicated locating tickets, it's improved. I think the numbers were 60 some odd percent since dedicated locating came into place. So that's a positive impact just alone by taking away those complex tickets from the load, by allowing a different path, a different avenue to get things done if you take nothing away from the program. That's been a really positive takeaway. And the whole reason it was introduced too, if you go back, is because of the broadband building all the fiber networks and has been the primary use of dedicated locating in Ontario too, is to help facilitate, especially those rural broadband projects. And it's in fact some of the changes that have come out this year or late last year now mandate, you have to use 'em for those projects too. So there's been further changes to how this has developed. So it's been positive from making sure those are getting done and from improving the overall experience to the industry. Is it

perfect? By no means no. And there's still a huge amount of bottlenecks out there and things that need to be improved and that can be improved, but it's had a positive impact, at least

Mike Sullivan ([23:01](#)):

Going back to what we talked about at the top of our discussion is there's been so many changes in the notification center process from calls to clicks and there was the big shift and then managing data better, moving from grid to polygon, reducing the number of notifications for our members, even the contact center itself. Obviously it's not call heavy anymore. So we have a chat enabled functions as well beyond the traditional processing by phone, but locating and marking hasn't changed. The mechanism has always been that the excavator is going to wait for a locator to arrive, but now is going, the possibility for that is moving into their hands as well, and they can manage that timeline. This is going to be, it's a game changer. I truly believe that it's early days once we roll this out, but it is a game changer. And if we look at other parts of the world or even Canada, British Columbia for example, they've been managing locates similarly, not the same but similarly for many, many years.

[\(24:15\)](#):

And that's just the way it's done there. When we look at Australia, and I have another podcast I'm recording later today with Mel Green, all the CEO before you dig Australia, and we'll be talking about a little bit about this as well. I have no doubt because this is just how it's done in Australia. The excavator locates its air responsibility. It's always been that way, which is interesting because if you look at the climate there, you can dig 12 months of the year and probably 12 hours a day in the bright sun. So they never had to face any locate delays brought along by seasonal changes. And yet this is just how they manage the locate process. Do you think we're going to get there in Canada? Could this be the catalyst that brings along that change that one day it will be the excavator who is going to be locating everything and what I like, I'm not going to say yes, this is it because I can't dictate that. But what we can dictate is that if there is a potential to go there, we have to create the rigors around it to manage the integrity of the process. Do you think we're doing that right?

Ron Laidman ([25:36](#)):

Well, definitely not yet. So I could see maybe a future where there are many excavators doing locates. So

Mike Sullivan ([25:46](#)):

You mean definitely not yet. We're not doing this, we're doing the internal.

Ron Laidman ([25:50](#)):

We're definitely not. So what are you doing? Why are we this not at the point where all the excavators are going to be doing their own locates? That's what I was getting at. And whether we ever get to that, that's for way in the future us to be talking about. It's a

Mike Sullivan ([26:07](#)):

Huge paradigm shift, right? It's a big shift. Yeah,

Ron Laidman ([26:11](#)):

There is a lot, lot of integrity, a lot of work that goes into the locate service providers and the training and just the resourcing and the whole formality around that side of the industry that I don't think many

excavators fully appreciate too or understand. They just don't have exposure to that. So I think that's going to be part of the benefit of rolling this out is there's going to be an opportunity now for more excavators to get exposed to that, to get involved. It's going to start building up. We've seen it in Ontario too. We've got a few more excavators who are now able to do their locating as well, but it was a process to get them there. So I think we're putting the right path, the right roadblock, right roadblocks, the right steps in place here

Mike Sullivan ([26:55](#)):

Or we've got the right roadblocks in place and progress will be imminent. Yeah,

Ron Laidman ([26:59](#)):

We've got, we're on the right path here. And I think what we're doing here in Alberta is actually providing a more accessible option for the excavators and for everyone in the industry to get involved and to understand what's evolved and to grow and to evolve to that model that we're talking about. Whether it's going to be fully excavators doing this, I can't see that in the foreseeable future, but maybe 20 years from now, who knows, maybe we're going to have all the records, they're all going to be accessible and there's going to be no more need for locating at all and it's just going to be based on accurate JIS records at that point. That's a possible future that we get to 20 years from now.

Mike Sullivan ([27:40](#)):

Nothing surprises me more than what people and I also, the general, the population is capable of. And I look back experience wise, when we shifted from the call before you dig to click, before you dig in at the time was just to manage the volume of the call center. We had no idea that there would be further benefits. And when we did that, I think initially we were about 30%, 35% on the web. We put out the click before you dig, Hey, why don't you try this? And we had a bit of not a bid. We a significant and sustained push for that from an awareness perspective. Next thing you know it's 65% almost like that overnight, right? And when I look at the Canadian Common Ground Alliance dirt report that just came out a few weeks ago, collectively across Canada, now we're just under 90% of all locate requests go through the web across Canada.

([28:42](#)):

In Alberta in December, 92% of all locate requests went through the web, 92%. That's a short trip we took to get there in triple the number of the percentage really of locate requests have gone to the web. Similarly, maybe this will happen too. And the other part we realized not that long ago was that the likelihood of damage is less than it's reduced by more than half when a person requests a locate on the web as opposed to on the phone. I'm curious. And we did an analysis and it was interesting. Wow, you're twice as likely to have damage if you request a locate by phone. And that was in about three or four years ago. And we sent that data off to Ontario and a few others, Ontario said, you know what, not only are you right, but our data, our analysis says it's even more likely for damage than what your percentage is for the phone.

([29:44](#)):

So at the time we mandated locate requests must be on the web if you're a contractor. Remember now I'm curious, and we won't have the data for this right away, but I'm curious, 18 months, two years, three years down the road, we'll locates that are conducted by the project proponent, let's say the road builder or the contractor, will there be less damages through that means as opposed to the conventional means? And that will, I believe, tell the tail. I believe that will set the path forward five, 10 years from

now when perhaps the data will be so compelling that industry will say, you know what? Why are we promoting that? We'll do the locates rather than the digging community because their damages are less. Now I don't know if that's going to happen or not, but the fact when you have that person right there with you, maybe even part of your team, there's that ongoing communication all the time. The likelihood in my view, and this is just me thinking the likelihood of damage is already going to be diminished. So we'll see. I think we'll

Ron Laidman ([31:00](#)):

See what happens. I would tend to agree with you and there's less chance or less likelihood of them having to wait for their locate and potentially doing something risky. I think that's not that people do that, but it does happen.

Mike Sullivan ([31:14](#)):

And if you have that person as part of your team who's not only locating, they begin to absorb that part of the job, it becomes them. They don't want to see damage and they're going to say, Hey, wait a minute. You're supposed to start hand digging right now. Whereas if that person, that person who's locating is already gone to the next job to locate something and they're not there, I keep digging. It's okay. And that's where a lot of the damages happen. They didn't hand dig. So I think we're going to see less damages. We'll see. We'll see. Ron, you're coming to our 40th anniversary and safety conference in a couple of weeks. I am looking forward to seeing you there. I know that you're probably not completely aware of exactly what you're going to be doing while you're here, but that's okay. It's going another just in time production as I'd like to say. But maybe just tell us a little bit about what you're going to be doing with the conference.

Ron Laidman ([32:07](#)):

Yeah, well, a few things definitely. I'm going to take the opportunity to meet with some of the stakeholders who we've been working with the last few months and get some actual face time in person. And I am planning to join Ian as well from ATCO to talk about the ALP rollout and just discuss that program more too. So I think there's going to be a lot of opportunity for soft interactions with folks and also to learn more formally about the programs and what's been going on. And I'm also happy to answer questions about what's happening in Ontario and other places too, and lessons we can learn from that.

Mike Sullivan ([32:44](#)):

Well, we're looking forward to seeing you, and I want to make some introductions for you as well. While you're here, obviously Mel Greenall, I'd love to have that chance to introduce the two of you. Jim and James from their podcast will be here as well and be interesting to introduce you to them as well. I'd like to meet you personally face to face. I haven't done that yet, and so that'd be probably a good thing as well. But yeah, I'm looking forward to having you here on, it's going to be a great conference. It's going to be a celebration as well. It's 40 years that we've been providing the service to Albertans and also to other neighboring provinces for the last 10 or so. So it's a good time to celebrate and it's a good time to reflect, but it's also a great time to look forward and thanks for helping us do that today. Thanks for helping us look forward. I mean, in this space, it's critical that we get this done and critically we get it right and getting it right is going to take some time, but I'm glad we have you as part of the team to help us do that.

This transcript was exported on Feb 04, 2024 - view latest version [here](#).

Ron Laidman ([33:44](#)):

Yep, happy to be here.

Mike Sullivan ([33:47](#)):

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 directory you're listening on. And please do leave a rating. You can follow us on X at utility safety, and we're also on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, email us at info@utilitysafety.ca and put podcast in the subject header. I'm Mike Sullivan, president of Utility Safety Partners. One click costs you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.