

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

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

Hey everybody. Welcome to the Safety Moment podcast. My guest today is me. Actually, I'm going to be doing a solo episode today. I want to talk to you about the upcoming Utility Safety Partners Safety Conference taking place April 14 and 15 in Edmonton at the JDW Marriott Hotel, the one that's connected to Rogers Place and home of the Oilers. This should be an interesting conference. We do have actually a bit of a hockey theme going on. Why not? That's c Evanton Oilers. We have an excellent lineup. Let's get right into it. Our conference begins on the morning of, well, it's not really the conference beginning on that morning, but Monday, April 14th, we have training going on. So the ground disturbance 1 0 1 training, locating 1 0 1, ground disturbance 2 0 1, taking place in the morning in the afternoon, followed by committee meetings, the Training Standards committee meeting, the Education Awareness Committee meeting and the best practices meeting.

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And then we have an opening reception at 5:00 PM to 6:00 PM with the exhibitors. This is always a lot of fun. You have all the exhibitors, have all their wares open to the floor, you get to mingle wine and cheese type thing and meet everybody. It's a great time for everybody to come together before the conference begins. And then at 6:00 PM the door is open for the Utility Safety Partners Awards Dinner and Social Event. And what we began last year at our 40th anniversary was this event to recognize the excavator locator and member of the year and last year's winners. A number of people were provided to us for each category, and then our operations advisory committee went through those candidates and we finally weeded out the winners. Same thing is taking place this year. So we get to award the excavator locator a member of the year for the second time for 2024.

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Last year was 2023, and we'll be awarding those recipients that night and thank you for everybody who did submit a potential winner. The recognition factor is sensational and I'm glad we're finally doing that in Alberta. We have so many professional representatives in every facet of the damage prevention process in Alberta, and it's really nice to be able to finally recognize those people. The next morning we begin right and early at 7:00 AM with our breakfast until 8:00 AM and at 7:30 AM the welcoming remarks and the annual general meeting for Utility Safety Partners takes place. I'll be presenting the A GM, and this is somewhat of a welcome yes, but it's also how we've performed in 2024 and what are we going to be doing coming up in the next year, 2025 and beyond from that point. When that's done, we have a actual Utility Safety Partners board meeting.

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Our Q1 board meeting takes place and then the educational sessions begin. So we have a number of educational sessions on Tuesday morning that are concurrent, three concurrent sessions at a time, and the trade show is open in between those sessions, which we have large blocks of time for the trade show, two hours in the morning on Tuesday and another hour dedicated in the afternoon that same day. We have an all attendee panel after lunch, which is the Canadian one call notification Center leadership panel. So myself and my colleagues from Quebec, a excavation, Jean Corti, Jim Ke from Ontario One Call and Donna Grant, who is the new president of BC One Call, they'll be joining me on a panel and we'll be responding to some prepared questions as well as responding to questions from the audience. Then we get back to the educational sessions until the closing at four 30.

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And this is what brings me to something I've been dying to tell you guys about for a very long time. As I mentioned, we are hosting this event at the JDW Marriott, which is connected to Roger's Place, the home of the Edmonton Oilers. We do have a bit of a hockey theme going on during the conference and we thought, how can we mark this event? How can we draw attention to it in a very unique way? And so what we did is we commissioned an artist who was very well renowned and sought after to create a utility safety partners slash click before you dig Goldie Mask. And I got the final photographs of the Goldie Mask last night. It's completed and it looks amazing with every person who enters the conference, every registrant you are automatically entered into the contest to go home with this one of a kind CSA approved Goldie mask.

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If you actually were a hockey Goldie, you could wear this mask, although I really hope you don't. It's a real conversation piece, something that should be hanging up in an office somewhere. Anyway, that mask is going to be won by somebody and you can buy more tickets if you want at the conference. And the conference, sorry, the drawing for that mask will take place at the end of the conference at four 30, between four 30 and five o'clock with the closing remarks. That is going to be super cool. Now, I want to tell you a little bit about how I connected with this artist. So her name is Sylvie Poco, Sylvie's little Quebec. And how I got to know her was years ago. And I mean years ago a friend of mine worked for iTech and I was actually playing goal on a team here in Calgary.

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And one day I arrived home and there was this box from iTech on my front porch and I brought it in and it was three Goldie masks in it and a goalie bag. And my friend had sent me these masks. Hey Mike, here you go. And I was like, wow, this is awesome. So then I found out he was moonlighting, not as a goalie mask distributor, not doing that. He was moonlighting as an artist for goalies, NHL and Minor Leagues. He was a fantastic airbrush artist and he had some really, really cool stuff. And anyway, I was sort of that's great, put it in my back pocket. Sort of forgot about it for many years. And then when we were preparing for the 40th anniversary last year, we were hoping to do this, a goalie mask. And I reached out to my friend and he said, you know what?

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I don't do it anymore. I haven't been doing this for a long time and I just don't have the time anymore. But there's somebody else, Sylvie Ra, and here's her Instagram account and here's her contact information. Why don't you reach out to Sylvia? I'm sure she'd be able to accommodate. So this is well in advance of the 40th, may not even mean well in advance. And she's so busy doing goalie masks that she could not accommodate us for the 40th, which was unfortunate. But here we are a year later and she has created this beautiful one of a kind Goldie mask for the conference that somebody's going to walk home with. And it's perfectly beautiful utility safety partners click before you dig. And I tell you right now, I would love to have this in my office, but I won't. But I really, really envy the person who's going to get it.

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So that's kind of the cool thing about this conference and with this podcast and our E-news gets going out next week. On Tuesday, next week you'll be able to see this goalie mask. We're going to be posting some pictures of it and I should be receiving it next week by Purolator. And you can go online, you can take a look at it, we'll put it on our website, we'll put it on LinkedIn and our social media, Instagram, you name it, to promote awareness of this. And I would love to see whoever receives this mask to show us when it's done and what they're going to do with it. So that's the conference. It's going to be a lot of fun.

We're looking forward to seeing everybody. And after this conference we'll get back into our two year cadence. So the conference will take place every two years.

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And that cadence was broken a little bit by our first one last year because it was our 40th anniversary. It was a celebration if you went to the 40th anniversary and safety conference, this one won't be quite like that. We don't have a 1980s hairband for our reception, but we do expect to have a really good time with everybody. We're looking forward to having everybody there. And the event that the Education and Awareness Committee has assembled for Edmonton is really top-notch sensational. For example, one of the speakers we have coming in, his name is Big Daddy TAs. And if you haven't seen Big Daddy Taz, he's a tremendous speaker, very funny guy, Canadian guy. And he learned that he was funny in high school and he gives a sensational talk that is relevant to what we're doing. He makes it relevant to whichever group he's talking to and he's a lot of fun.

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So that's one of the things that we're looking forward to as well, beyond just the event and the conference. So tip of the hat to the Education Awareness Committee, which incidentally, there are now 28 members on that committee and I'm really impressed. Hats off to the committee. Hats off to my colleague Cassie Zaba, our manager of stakeholder relations and also the task force that was really dedicated to the conference itself. I mean they had help obviously, but there were also six people on that task force sharing the load to get this done. And you look back to when we unified Alberta one call with the Where's the Line campaign and the Alberta Common Ground Alliance, this was one of the things that we knew would be a struggle. We knew that getting these committees going because it had really become a lull with the Alberta Common Ground Alliance times were tough, the committee numbers were drawing down the people that were attending the A BCJ meetings was diminishing.

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It was a challenging time in the energy industry in Alberta and it still is to a certain degree, but that was really the beginning of it. And we knew that when we unified resources with the Alberta Common Ground Alliance, that it was going to be challenging to get these committees back to where they needed to be. And I would say within the last 18 months or so, the committees are really, really, really strong compared to what they were when we first kicked off with Unified Utility Safety Partners. So having a number like 28 on that committee is excellent. And I tip of the hat to everybody there. And on the heels of this, they are working, that committee is working on Safe Month, which is beginning in April. So you look out the window right now and it is getting a lot nicer out and we do have a much better outlook compared to a few weeks ago, all the snow on the ground.

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And the other committees are doing phenomenally well as well. The Training Standards committee is really just chugging along. They are somewhat independent actually of utility safety partners by design because they have a revenue stream and their revenue goes directly to the training Standards Committee does not come to Utility Safety Partners where that wasn't the case with the Alberta Common Ground Alliance. That revenue stream was helping maintain the A-B-C-G-A at the time. And now it's maintaining the TSC because they do have expenses, they have their own administrator, they have auditors. And so yeah, there are expenses that they have to manage there and they also attend conferences and that type thing and they do so on their own time.

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The other major committee, we have a couple more, but the other big one is the best practices committee under ed plant. And that committee also, I can't remember the exact numbers, but it's over 30 that are on that committee now. And that is a tough committee to work with. I mean you just talk about best practices in general and depending who you talk to, you tend to get a different response like what is a best practice? And that is a challenging in itself. But that committee, what it's been able to do over the last couple of years has been excellent. They rewrote the damage prevention process in Alberta and they are currently working on the homeowner version of the damage prevention process in Alberta. So those committees are doing phenomenally well. And if you look back four or five years, where they came from, it's night and day.

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So when we did the transition, when we did the unification with the other organizations, it was well planned. But even then there was an element of a leap of faith, if you will. And where we are today is light years ahead of where we were and where I hoped we would be. And if you look even at the operations of Alberta One Call and where we are today, and I said Alberta one call purposely because then I'm talking about the contact center when began, when I came to Alberta one call in 2011, we had about 60 agents providing services for Albertans only. And now with our full contingency of agents this year we're down to 31 and we provide services for Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba. And most of those are online obviously. And that's again the evolution of where we've been to, where we're going, where we are and where we're going.

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I remember vividly being in a vehicle, leaving a meeting with she Kirk, and the meeting had been talking about change. And I remember telling her, I said, from this point forward, things change. And that was exactly it. We are achieving. We are getting to the point where that meeting discussion has come to fruition and we've moved a lot of those resources that were in the contact center to the field. We are about to launch our sixth safety ambassador in Lethbridge that launches in April, early April. And this will be likely our last ambassador. And it wasn't that long ago. We only had one, then we had two, then three, and we had three for the longest time and now we're going to have six. So again, this is part of that evolution. Transferring the shifting from calls to clicks has allowed us to move the education awareness and advertising needle to where it should be.

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And those resources are so important to have the boots on the ground education and awareness and training compliment the advertising campaign that we do. And for a number of years we had to cut the advertising campaign to subsidize operations. We just didn't have enough revenue to do so, but now we have revenue certainty as well. And so we've come a long way and really I thank my members, the board members and my colleagues that really made it all happen. We've really come a long way and in part the conference is a way to acknowledge that the Alberta Common Ground Alliance had held conferences when it was up and running and we wanted to be able to continue that covid delayed it. But here we are with our second one. The next one after this will be 2027 and 2029, et cetera, and going forward, and I hope they're all as enjoyable and interesting as what we have planned here in Edmonton coming up.

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What else do we have planned? Well, actually let me talk about something that the notification center panel we'll be addressing in a couple of weeks. Ontario One call is mandating online locate requests for homeowners. And that might sound ominous and it shouldn't, but I guess I understand why it would, and I didn't know if I'd ever see this happen in any province or state while I was still working that any province or state would mandate online locate requests for all stakeholders, homeowners, contractors

and members. And I applaud them for it. And for the simple reason that we know locate requests that are generated online, reduced damages, full stop. And there's a hesitancy to shift homeowners to the web mandating that. Give you an example. Currently Alberta receives about 70,000, 75,000 locate requests from homeowners every year. It's about 17% roughly of the locate requests that we receive overall, of those roughly 55 to 60% are online and the other 40% roughly are submitted by phone.

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Now what we also know anecdotally, but we don't have any hard data, but we keep being told this, is that a lot of the digging community contractors, whether they're doing fences or decks or something like that working for homeowners, they tell them, look, you put the locate request in, not us. And that contributes to the homeowner total. But where's the tipping point? If we were to mandate locate requests on the web for homeowners, where's that tipping point where a homeowner will say, oh yeah, I can do that. No problem online. Or they say, I don't know if I can do this online. I don't know if I want to. And so they don't at all. They just choose to do the work and dig without a locate. And that's the hesitancy about doing this.

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So what we're doing here in Alberta, I mean, we're watching what's happening in Ontario and I do applaud them for it, but we are watching what they will do. And we're going to be talking about this at our conference and we're looking at the data here in Alberta. And if we were to launch this, it's not going to be tomorrow, it's not going to be next year. It's going to be a little while from now if we were to launch it at all. But we are paying a lot of very close attention to what's happening in Ontario. And we're not the only ones. A lot of folks we know across the board in Canada and the US are looking at Ontario and seeing how that goes. So these are the things that are interesting when you're in this business. And then, as I said earlier, I didn't think we would be able to see this. We would see this at all in my time that a province or a state would shift a hundred percent online, even though I believe it's the right thing to do. But believing and doing are two different things. So we have to make sure that we cross all our sevens and dot all our JS before we do anything like that.

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So that's the podcast this time around and doing a bit solo. But I wanted to talk to you as I already have about our conference. And once again, I want to recognize the Education Awareness Committee for all the hard work that they do. I want to really promote the event. So I want to recognize, obviously Sylvia Pot, she's sensational, and we'll be putting her Instagram account into our eNews and our show notes. And she's predominantly Unilingual French, and I've been able to practice my English, sorry, my French, my English too, apparently. And anyway, I'm looking forward to sharing all that with you. And that's going to wrap things up on our podcast this time. 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. Please do leave a message or a rating I should say. You can follow us on X Twitter at utility safety. We're also on Instagram and Facebook. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, email us at info@utilitysafety.ca. Put podcast in the subject header, and here's something new. Maybe you'd like to be a sponsor for the safety moment. It happens. So why not think about it. I'm Mike Sullivan, I'm the president of Utility Safety Partners, and click to know what's above and below. One click cost you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything.