Announcer (00:00:02):

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 (00:00:15):

Thanks for joining me on the Safety Moment Podcast today by Utility Safety Partners. My guest today is Mr. Carl Weimer. He's the former executive director and the current advisor of special projects for the Pipeline Safety Trust, an organization that has had a tremendous impact on the industry, the pipeline industry, regulatory, governance, enforcement, general overall awareness, and not just in the United States, but also here in Canada and around the world. Carl, thank you so much for joining me today. It means a lot to have you with me today. Thanks for having me on. I'm always happy to speak to my friends north of the border. And you have many I know that. So that's great. And as we were talking about a few moments ago, I was informed or exposed to the Pipeline Safety Trust many years ago and shortly thereafter after obviously the incident happened in Wat Creek, and we'll talk about that a little bit shortly.

(00:01:15):

But as a regulator with the National Energy Board when I was there, and again with Alliance Pipeline when I was with Alliance, and it's been an interesting journey to witness from the perspective of the governance factor or the transmission pipeline industry as well. And what you've been able to do and what the Pipeline Safety Trust has been able to do has been nothing short of miraculous, but it's based on the merits or the unfortunate circumstances, I should say, of that event back in 1999. But before we get into all that, perhaps I can just ask you to introduce yourself because you weren't always a pipeline advocate and your journey throughout your career has taken on some different paths.

Carl Weimer (00:02:03):

Sure. I hadn't ever thought about pipelines until about 25 years ago when the one that exploded here in our town.

(00:02:11):

So it was not a career path I chose when I got involved. I knew nothing about pipeline. So it was a steep learning curve and we kind of stumbled along and I appreciate you saying that. We've done well in the last 25 years. My background is I ended up out here in Washington State. I'm right near the Canadian border in Washington State in Bellingham. I actually grew up in Michigan. I came out here to work in one of the national parks when I was going to college back in the seventies and fell in love with the idea of mountains. They claim they have mountains in Michigan, but they don't really No, in the ocean. The Great Lakes are great, but it's not the ocean. That's right. So I ended up stuck out here pretty soon after that internship and to work for the National Park Service for five years.

(00:03:02):

Kicked around in a variety of natural resource jobs with the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and other agencies. And then I got into the nonprofit world and I was the executive director of a regional environmental nonprofit at the time. The Bellingham incident occurred in 1999, and we were doing a lot of work on water quality issues, air quality issues. We ran the recycling programs for the area. We even had a big retail store where we had a cruise that went out and took down old homes, collected old building materials and sold the windows and the doors and the lumber and the flooring back because we just hated to see that stuff just go to a landfill. So that was kind of my environmental background doing that. And the pipeline blew up here in

Mike Sullivan (00:03:48):

Bellingham, and that obviously was a major event, not just for Bellingham and not just for you, but for so many people, the entire community. And really the shock wave of that throughout the pipeline industry and around North America and even around the world continues to this day. And the pipeline safety trust, it wasn't immediate obviously after that event, it took some time for that to take shape. But before we get into the event of the day, and maybe you can tell us what the Pipeline Safety Trust is?

Carl Weimer (00:04:25):

Yeah, the Pipeline Safety Trust, it's a nonprofit organization. We were organized, I think we were incorporated in 2003 or 2004. I'm hazy in my dates that far back, but as a nonprofit, we can advocate for things and we advocate for pipeline safety. And I think we were kind of surprised when we first formed. We thought we'd be working with neighborhood associations and environmental groups and other people trying to push for that. And when we got into it, we learned that really no one at that time 25 years ago was paying hardly any attention to pipelines at all other than the regulators that regulated them and the industry that owned 'em. So we found ourselves working more and more with both the regulators in the industry because we all shared the goal of wanting to make things safer. We kind of go about at it different ways. It's easy for us not owning pipelines to push for safety stuff. The owners of the pipelines have to worry about how much that might cost, and so that can cause some friction. But I think we've come to an understanding over the years that really the bottom line is we all want safety.

Mike Sullivan (00:05:36):

And it was interesting, that event and even the creation of the Common Ground Alliance, it almost paralleled. I mean, it was just a happenstance really. It wasn't just circumstance that it happened that way, but there's a parallel path between the pipeline Safety Trust in some respects and the common Ground alliance in the United States. And then later on the Canadian Ground Alliance that emerged here in Canada. There was some elements that I wanted to bring in from the Pipeline Safety Trust, but that going back to that event, now you're in a completely different path from not just the community and you're what you were doing for a living, but like you said before, pipelines are just not top of mind. And I think that would be largely the case for just about everybody. I like to think that because of the work that people like yourself have done, that the trust has done, the Common Ground Alliance has done people a little bit more savvy today, people a little bit more aware of what's buried below the ground, the laws to request to locate before excavation. Obviously all of that helps. The public awareness programs have come a long way since then, but back then that just wasn't the case. And so that day, I mean, a lot happened before that day in June to create the event of that day.

(00:07:03):

And I'm sure you've done this a zillion times before, but can you walk us through what happened that day?

Carl Weimer (00:07:10):

Sure. I mean, it was kind of a typical beautiful day here in the Pacific Northwest. June 10th, 1999, four o'clock in the afternoon, a pipeline ruptured in Wacom Falls Park, which is kind of the iconic northwest park here in Bellingham. It has stone bridges over the creek and waterfalls. People get married there, people get engaged there, people picnic there. It's a beautiful place. And on that day, people were in there enjoying the park. At four o'clock in the afternoon, the pipeline ruptured, ultimately dumped a quarter million gallons of unleaded gasoline into Whatcom Creek, which runs right through the middle

of the park. And it took about an hour before it found an ignition source and exploded up and down the park for two miles killing every living thing in that stream. They could not find even a single bug or fish or critter alive in the creek the next day.

(00:08:15):

Unfortunately, there were three boys that were also in the park at the time and got killed because of the explosion. Two 10 year olds were playing in the park. It was their backyard. They were doing like 10 year olds normally do. They got home from school, they were off in the woods playing Lord knows what, building forts and all that stuff right in their backyard. And they got burned to death. They managed to get themselves out of the creek, drag themselves into their driveway where they met their parents and the burns on their body were almost complete. They had no clothes on. Their skin was actually dripping off them. The were so bad. Oh my gosh. And town was a mess because of the explosion and the traffic all tied up. So ambulances, it took 'em a long time to get to them. And some of the ambulance drivers that transported those two who were still talking at the time, even though they were so badly burned, had retire after that because they just couldn't return to the service because of the trauma.

(00:09:17):

There was also an 18-year-old boy who had just graduated from high school a couple of weeks before he was supposed to work that day. He showed up to go to work at a fishing shop. He loved fly fishing, and they said, oh, it's pretty slow. If you want to take the day off and go fishing, go ahead. So he jumped at that chance and he went to Whatcom Falls Park where he crawled down into the canyon where there was good fly fishing, and he was doing his fly fishing there when this wall of diesel wall of unleaded gas came down floating on the surface of the creek, he couldn't get out of the canyon. So he was overcome with the fumes and he fell in the creek and drowned even before the ignition happened. So not only did it traumatize our community, it looked like an atomic bomb had gone off over the top of Bellingham.

(00:10:04):

You see the pictures and it's stunning. No one knew what happened. The city of Bellingham had kind of forgot they had these two pipelines that run right through the middle of the park, so no one knew what happened. And it took over an hour before officials really understood what was going on. The radio was coming up with all kinds of weird theories about what happened. I was right on the banks of Whatcom Creek that day. I was standing there, I was on my way home, and I stopped at our retail store where I mentioned that we sold usability materials. And I was in there doing management by walking around and somebody came running in and said, Bellingham just exploded. And we went outside and looked up, we looked past the creek up overhead, and here's this looked like an atomic bomb cloud going up and turned the radio on.

(00:10:55):

And all we heard was there's fuel in the creek, it's running towards town. And we were standing like 15 feet from the creek in town and thought, okay, let's evacuate everybody out of the building, get everybody out of the area. And that's what we did. And I got in my car and headed the other direction. I didn't know what was in that cloud. It looked pretty scary, and I actually had to pull over and get out and walk around a little bit because the trauma of it hit me. I had shaky legs and thought, oh, I'm not safe to be driving. But I was out of town at that point. That's what happened that day. It was your typical pipeline failure where multiple things went wrong, any one of which if the pipeline operator had corrected it or a regulator had caught it and made them correct it, we wouldn't have had the tragedy that day. And I'm glad to kind of talk through the multiple things that went wrong if you're interested.

Mike Sullivan (00:11:50):

Oh, absolutely. I am. Yeah. Just from, again, my governance background, general interest in pipeline transmission, operations background. I mean, obviously it wasn't a guillotine break there. I'm guessing it wasn't third party damage because it was in the park. Was it just an integrity issue with the metallurgy or the steel, the pipe, or is it a weld mark there, a longitudinal weld that gave way? What was it that happened?

Carl Weimer (00:12:19):

Yeah, it was interesting because as the National Transportation Board investigated this, they had a hard time coming up with a cause because so many different things had gone wrong. You could blame different things, but ultimately it was third party damage. Oh, it was. I didn't know that. Yes, the pipeline ran right within the park is the city's drinking water treatment facility. The pipeline was there first. They put this drinking water treatment facility in there. So there's a maze of water pipelines in the ground all around that crisscross the pipeline. And the city of Bellingham was doing work to expand on their water treatment plan and replace some of those water pipelines. So they were doing a big project and during that project, one of the contractors hit the Olympic pipeline and dinged it didn't rupture anything, but as they dug it up to investigate, you could see the claw marks of the backhoe on the pipeline.

(00:13:18):

They didn't tell anybody. They actually, there was some evidence that they put some tar like substance over there and some tape tried, tried to cover it up and buried it again without telling anybody. So that was the first thing that went wrong. The third party damage, I mean, it's got more complicated because the agreement with the city for all this plans for the work was Olympic Pipeline was supposed to be on site anytime anybody was digging near there to make sure that didn't happen. They weren't there. So that part of the avoiding third party damage failed. The company didn't report that they'd hit it, but even so Olympic pipeline knew there was damage there. They had run smart pigs in the years after that a couple of times and knew there was flaws in the pipeline there. They had been ordered to dig it up and have a look by the state regulator. And one reason or another, they just had never done that. So on the day of the explosion, the other thing that was going on is they had recently installed some new valve stations, a new pump station downstream from there, and they installed a valve wrong. And that valve had slammed shut all by itself 40 some times before in the six months before this incident. So every time that block valve slammed shut, you got a pressure wave that came back towards Bellingham and hit the pipe. And

Mike Sullivan (00:14:45):

I gather that valve was downstream of the damage,

Carl Weimer (00:14:48):

Downstream of the damage. So the pressure wave came back up and went through that damaged spot on June 10th, 1999. That pressure was enough to pop the pipe right there and the pipe ruptured open and all the fuel spilled out and drained across the field and down into the creek. I mean, it got even worse because they were doing some alive upgrades on their SCADA system that controlled the pipe. And as they did that, they lost all operation of their SCADA system. So they were operating the pipe blind for over an hour because their SCADA system went down as they were transferring data into the live system. So they got some warning things that there's something wrong with the pipe, but because this valve had shut 40 some times in the previous months, they assumed it was just that bad valve doing it again. They called people at the refinery, they called people at the station and they turned the pipe

back on. So they actually pumped more fuel into the creek because they were operating blind before everything finally got shut down.

Mike Sullivan (00:15:56):

The parallels of that incident, and you're telling me things I was not aware of, there's some parallels of an event that happened near Edmonton, Alberta back in 1979. Somebody hit a propane pipeline way back before March, 1979, attempted to repair it, and there was evidence of that as well. And when you introduce an anomaly, a weak spot in a transmission or any pipeline, it's like taking a coat hanger and bending it and bending it and bending. Eventually it's going to break. You have that weak spot, and that's exactly what happened there. And 18,000 people evacuated. Somebody was, one gentleman was badly vaginally injured for life, and nobody was killed. But that was one of the precursors for Alberta One Call, which Utility Safety Partners is today. And when you're telling me me this, what happened that day in Whatcom Creek, that history can essentially repeat itself, even though we've learned so much in that 20 year span between 1979 and 1999, it concerns me even more perhaps, and could we repeat this again?

(00:17:15):

We can certainly talk about that later. But the events of that day, as horrific as they were, and obviously there was a tremendous amount of investigation that went on afterwards, and the NTSB would've done that. And similarly here, the National Energy Board would've done the same if it was a pipeline under their jurisdiction, they would've conducted a major investigations into something like this. Now, the NTSB, they obviously had their findings. Olympic Pipeline was fined. They were from looking at information on the pipeline Safety Trusts website. They were criminally responsible. I understand. And they had to pay a hefty fine. Now, one of the, I can't remember her name, but I, Barbara Rothstein, I think it was, she awarded $4 million of that criminal charge to the pipeline Safety Trust too, or I don't even know what the Pipeline Safety Trust existed yet, but it was around that time, 2003 I guess. And that was really the seed money to get the trust off the ground. That must have been for the community itself. That had to be really a good boost after the events of June, 1999 that somebody is listening and we have something to go on here after this event happened. You were right there. Literally, you were right there. How did you get involved?

Carl Weimer (00:18:47):

Yeah, it's an interesting story because like I said, I'd never thought about pipelines. The community had never thought about pipelines. Unfortunately, the city had forgot they had these pipelines through the park and they had franchise agreements with the pipeline companies that kind of governed what the city could and couldn't do and what the pipeline company could and couldn't do. And those had expired. That's how much people were paying attention. They had expired a couple of years previously. So they're actually, the pipeline company had no legal agreement to even have a pipeline in the park at this point. And that kind of played a role in, as things turned out, gave the city a little more power on pushing for safety issues. I got involved because within a week of the incident, the Olympic Pipeline Company was already saying, the Seattle airport needs our jet fuel that comes through this pipeline.

(00:19:35):

People in Portland need our gasoline. We need to get this pipeline back in the ground and operating again into the people of Bellingham that had been traumatized. That made absolutely no sense because they had no idea why the pipeline had failed and why would you start up a pipeline that had just caused this type of disaster in Bellingham without knowing the city of Bellingham was scrambling to figure out

even who oversaw pipelines, the state regulators the same way. So some citizens came together. We had breakfast one morning, and it was a couple of different environmental groups, neighborhood associations, some local doctors that had been impacted by it. And we had breakfast and we said, well, what should citizens do in a case like this? And we decided, well, what we wanted to do was to push to make sure that pipeline didn't get started again until they knew why it had failed.

(00:20:28):

So we formed a group right there that morning at breakfast called Safe Bellingham, and I think I made the mistake of, they were talking about who's going to run this and everybody else who looked at their feet, and I didn't follow suit. And since I ran a local environmental organization and we had a thousand dollars in the bank in a copy machine, everybody looked at me and said, well, you're the clear winner of this thing. So we formed a group called Safe Bellingham, which ultimately lasted for four or five years and morphed into the Pipeline Safety Trust when that award came down. And the parents who lost their kids went to bat for the idea of the pipeline Safety trust pretty early on because while they were traumatized and grieving, they really wanted something to come out of this trauma to change things. So this wouldn't happen anywhere else, and that was one of our rallying cries. We wanted to make sure this didn't happen anywhere else, and we've kind of been a failure at that, but we've succeeded in some other ways.

Mike Sullivan (00:21:30):

I think you've succeeded in many ways. I'm trying to put myself in your position at that time, and you probably saw, well, what's going to happen here? Is this going to be the course to a new path in life or what? But it grew into something which was a movement really is what happened. And the timing, as I mentioned earlier, the parallel with the Common Ground Alliance, and probably these were two parallel paths that weren't really connecting yet at the time, and not until sometime later, but I can't even imagine, again, trying to put myself in your position at the time, what does all this mean? And you have no clear picture of what's to come. You really don't, but you see what happened, you see the families again, I can't imagine being those families either. And you know that something has to be done and that something was save Bellingham at the time. And over time it begins to take shape. It begins to, while you have that seed money that comes in, you have more than a thousand dollars now in the bank and a copy machine. You have a considerable amount of capital to begin to make a difference. When you got to that point, did this group that was safe Bellingham, did it become a board or how did all the creation of the trust, how did that happen?

Carl Weimer (00:23:02):

Yeah, I mean I think we were very wise actually. The parents of the children were very wise. They formed a small group to do some strategic planning. There was indications that the community came together, both our congressional delegation, the governor of the state, the mayor, the county executive, all pushed for the idea of a pipeline safety trust, some kind of an organization to watchdog pipeline safety and helped bring that about. And then as you said, as we started working with the Department of Justice, this was one of the few pipeline cases in the nation that had ever went criminal. And actually some of the pipeline operators actually were given jail time because of some of the issues associated with this. So it was pretty new. And as the parents started meeting with the Justice Department, the Justice Department was very supportive of that and went to bat for the idea of creating the pipeline safety trust with the judge. And then the hearing came down and we were awarded the $4 million. It wasn't clear how that was going to work. We thought we would probably have to report to the Environmental Protection Agency, or somebody would oversee us. And one day we got a call, we've got

a check here in Seattle for 4 million bucks. Anybody want to come pick it up? It's like Quickest drive I ever made to Seattle. Yeah,

Mike Sullivan (00:24:22):

No doubt.

Carl Weimer (00:24:23):

And then the board, like I said, went through a year of strategic planning before they really started to form the organization to figure out, okay, what do we want to do with this money? You could spend 4 million arguing over pipeline safety fairly quickly, or you could invest it the way they did and use that money ongoing for years to come. So they made some very good investment decisions. They formed a group to think about what should the pipeline safety trust be? What should the emphasis be with $4 million? If you're trying to live off that interest, you're not talking about tens or 10 or 20 staff people. You're talking about a couple of people plugging away. So how can we do that? Well, and they did a pretty marvelous job. I was involved, I was running Safe Bellingham, which had worked with them and as part of the strategic planning, and we came out with a plan and the safe Bellingham then was kind of an independent group, but said, boy, if you're going to take this on, go for it. And turned over all of our information and that became safe. Bellingham morphed into the pipeline Safety trust.

Mike Sullivan (00:25:36):

We're almost at the middle to the end of the digging season here in Alberta. And come September we start to see that honey do list, really expand those things we haven't got around to during the summer months. And let's face it, a lot of Alberta, we've had some rain, which we desperately needed the last few years, but it's made that honey-do list sit on a shelf and you haven't got it done yet. So I want you to be able to plan your work and work your plan and remember to please click before you dig at least five days before you're going to be doing any digging project, whether that's on in your backyard, the back 40, wherever it may be. Please click before you dig. It initiates the damage prevention process, which is more than just a locate request. You are engaging a series, a list of professionals whose sole job is to keep you safe.

(00:26:36):

Now, as a person like yourself, you said your awareness of pipelines, the community's awareness of pipelines and the regulatory governance, the operations, et cetera, was minimal if at best, at best, the steep learning curve you had to follow and the trust had to follow to begin to understand. I mean, obviously that begins with reading the reports of being part of the process of investigation and reading all the documentation that comes out of that. But that steep learning curve had to be incredible because not long after, and I see all, not long after, but really not that long after you were getting significantly engaged with whether was it Femr or the pipeline, hazardous Material Safety Administration or NTSB or state Governance State regulations, and you became an advocate. The pipeline Safety Trust became a very strong advocate for pipeline safety. That had to be, if it was me, I'd be waking up in the middle of the night saying, I can't do this. How can I do this? How can I match wits with some of these people that have been doing this for a living? And here you are. You did it.

Carl Weimer (00:27:53):

Yeah. And it was a steep learning curve, and we had to grab onto things that we could understand. And people need to realize in 1999, that was kind still at the dawn of the internet. You couldn't get on

Google and say, tell me about the Olympic pipeline and have an AI tell you everything. IT new. There was very little information available online. We found a report early on about the problems with ERW seam welds on this type of transmission pipeline, how they just can kind of unzip because of some manufacturing problems. And we knew that Olympic Pipeline was ERW pipe. So we started shouting about ERW pipe as a way to keep the pipeline closed. You need to check to see that. And turns out when they were forced to do a pressure test through Bellingham, the ERW seam unzipped right next to an elementary school that kind of sealed the deal with, oh, this pipeline needs some significant integrity management before it's allowed to start up again. So I started talking about ERW pipe. I would show up at press conferences and interrupt and be on camera talking about ERW Pipe, which I knew nothing about. I was just winging it. But we did know things about, oh, there's no information available. And as we started talking with the federal regulators, they agreed that that was a problem. And we joined forces then. And we went from nothing on the FMSA website about pipeline safety to they have so much information. Now the problem is what do you look at?

(00:29:25):

So we did a lot of efforts on getting more information available, getting the public to have a seat at the table, better public awareness, better engagement. We did know about those types of issues, and the industry really hadn't looked at how do you involve the public and build trust with the public because this was the first real incident that had caught national attention. But there was one a year after El Paso Pipeline down in New Mexico, blew up and killed 12 people on a riverbank. And those two right in a row really started growing the, okay, the public needs to get involved and pay attention to pipeline safety in the industry. And the regulators realized that also.

Mike Sullivan (00:30:09):

That was the part that really intrigued me the most when I'm working for the regulator here for Transmission Pipelines and National Energy Board, which is a Canada energy regulator. Today, I was involved in damage prevention and in the earlier day in part of my career there in 1994 or whatever it was, 92, and I remember part of my job was to audit public awareness programs because part of the regulations for damage prevention at the time, they required transmission pipeline companies to have public awareness programs informing the public of the presence of the pipeline and how to work and live safely near it. And it was pretty broad in that sense. But pipeline companies, some were doing a great job, some weren't, but it was a part of the regulation that really it was tucked away. Nobody's really asking any questions on it. But I began to ask questions on it and to the point where we had our very first public awareness workshop, I think it was in 1996, I think, and we did it here in Calgary.

(00:31:11):

And it was the first time that we had regulated companies coming together to talk to each other. Well, here's what we do to promote awareness or here's what we do. And it really began to create this little bit of one-upmanship, well, if they're going to do this, we're going to do that. But it got people talking and this is an area of pipeline operations. They're not competing. They are complimenting. And you'll have multiple pipelines perhaps on one section of land where your stakeholders are all the same, and well, why don't you work together? And then we did another one in 1997 in Vancouver, and then we did others as well. And we did one with the American Petroleum Institute in Niagara Falls. And it was interesting to see that take shape. And in Niagara Falls, it was the first time, and it was one of the board members, actually the vice chair of the National Energy Board at the time.

(00:32:07):

She said, Mike, you're going to invite the public. You're going to invite a stakeholder group. And it was the Canadian Alliance of Energy Pipeline Associations. And we did, and it was a lot of work to get them there and to have them be represented the same way that the pipeline industry was and the pipeline industry. They weren't crazy about it at the time, as you can well imagine, I'm sure you've experienced as well, but when I went to the first Pipeline Safety Trust conference, I attended, and I'm going to say it was probably 2006, I'm thinking around there, 2006 or oh seven. And that was the part that really intrigued me. Not the most, but it was, wow, this is good. Because you had the Common Ground Alliance, which was emerging at the same time, and you had the Pipeline Safety Trust and what you had, you had that, I'll say public or landowner stakeholder group identified, and they were invited to participate.

(00:33:10):

And when I got there, I was, again, I was working alliance's pipeline and I had to become comfortable with being uncomfortable in a sense, but it made total sense to me. But I wasn't among my peers where we're kind of patting each other on the back here. No, no. We're being held to account and we have the stakeholder group that perhaps means the most. We have our assets on their land, we're guests on their land. Yes, we have regulatory requirement or agreement to be there, but they own the land. We have to work together. And it became something that stuck with me and made the most sense to do. And when I began to work in parallel with the Canadian Common Ground Alliance, I was the executive director for almost a decade. That was one of the things I wanted to do. And we had a parallel board of directors and everything else similar to the CGA in the us and I was on the board of the Common Ground Alliance in the US for many years as well.

(00:34:16):

And the stakeholder groups were well identified, 14 different stakeholder groups. The public landowners is not one of them. And I wanted to change that in Canada. So I introduced the idea to the board of directors and they, are you crazy? Why would you want to do that? I said, well, hear me out. This just makes sense. And again, we need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. And it was a gentleman by the name of Patrick Smy with a Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, sepa. He said, you know what? I agree. I agree with Mike and I think we need to do this. And when he said that everything started to change and we reached out to Capla, we reached out to Dave Core who attended the PST conference in the past and said, Dave, we want to do this. Would you agree? And that really began to change the dynamic, I think of the Canadian Common Ground Alliance.

(00:35:13):

We had invitations, we had railways, we had the digging community. We had a number of different stakeholders, but we didn't have landowners. And I tipped my hat to you and the pipeline Safety Trust for putting that in my head to make that happen. But again, when I go back to those conferences that I did attend many years ago, it was an eyeopener because yeah, we were working collaboratively here in Canada and in the US as well, but were we really listening to the right stakeholders and the Pipeline Safety Trust conference, put that in my head. And really to this day, it makes me think about that stakeholder group. Even what I do today, whether it's the locate request process, click before you dig, call before you dig, are we doing it to meet the objectives of the user with not just the digging community, not just our members, but the general public that wants to do the right thing. They want to submit a locate request before they dig. And that to me is again, a piece that's not quite being listened to, but you guys did it. That had to be tough. That had to be tough, but you had the latitude to do so.

Carl Weimer (00:36:31):

Yeah, it was interesting. It's funny, I was on the phone just the other day with Jeff Weese, who used to be the head of FMSA for a number of years, and he was cracking up coming to the conference again this year. And he says, your conference has got kind of normalized now. Everybody's kind of friendly and gets along. The first two or three years we did that conference where you put angry landowners because their property was being taken or people in communities that had pipeline tragedies in with the industry. It was pretty tense the first few years. And I know a lot of people felt uncomfortable, and we kind of, how do we push that? Yes. If we're not making people uncomfortable, then we're probably not talking about the issues they want to talk about, but not let it get out of control because we've seen meetings like that too.

(00:37:23):

So yeah, that was interesting. And like you said, we've had a parallel track with the Common Ground Alliance. They were getting started just a little bit earlier than us, and we got invited to be part of a lot of that, and we had to triage a lot and with only two or three of us in the office to begin with anyway. Oh, there's all kinds of people paying attention to damage prevention and third party digs. We don't need to pay attention to that. That's handled. Certainly we knew what they were up to, but we didn't get all that involved just because we were focused on going to Congress and changing the law.

Mike Sullivan (00:38:02):

And again, that's strategic path forward. That's where you had to be. Now, some of the work I mentioned the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, sippa, and you were also on an external advisory panel. When did that happen? I was working with Alliance Pipeline and obviously with the NEB before that, but worth Alliance Pipeline. I was fortunate enough to be part of cpa and I was on different committees and I chaired different committees, damage prevention, emergency response, security management. But I think I was probably moving into my role here when that advisory panel was established. But what were you working with there? Who were you working with, I guess at cpa?

Carl Weimer (00:38:47):

Yeah, the CPA Adventure was a great one, and we even had our conference for a couple years in a row, had sessions called, they Do Things differently in Canada. And because we really came to believe they did and we got involved with cipa, 2010 was a really bad year for pipeline safety down here in the States. It started off in, I think it was June, with a pipeline spilled and dumped crude oil right into the middle of Salt Lake City and filled a pond. Not long, we thought, can't get much worse than that, not long after the Enbridge Pipeline split in Marshall, Michigan and dumped oil into the Kalamazoo River. And it said, well, we've peaked now. And then a month later, a pipeline split in Sand Bruno and killed a number of people and destroyed a big chunk of a neighborhood coming out of that 2010. We were really looking for ways to push pipeline safety forward and were contacted by CIPA to be part of this external advisory committee to look at how the industry in Canada deals with pipeline integrity and the way they were doing it seemed much more progressive than what we were seeing in the United States. And so we agreed to do that just to learn how people do things differently in Canada. That's how we initially got involved in it, kind of expanded for a few years, their work we were doing with cipa.

Mike Sullivan (00:40:11):

It's unfortunate that CIPA is no longer, as you know, it closed its doors some years ago now, and some parts of CIPA remain a community of practice. They do remain, but the entity that was CIPA has disappeared. And I think that was a really sad day in Canada for the federally or just transmission pipeline industry, not just federal, but provincial legislation regulation as well. I'm hopeful that at some

point, something like CIPA returns, the void that was left by CIPA closing its doors has been picked up here and there. Alberta One call, we changed five years ago, a little over five years ago when we unified resources with the Alberta Common Ground Alliance, and it gave us a much broader mandate. So things like that have happened across the country, not because of what happened with CIPA closing its doors, but maybe in part that was an influencing factor, but we don't have that central point anymore.

(00:41:22):

I do agree with you that there are things that were done differently in Canada and was it better? Was it more coordinated? I don't know. But they were done differently. Perhaps we were a bit more nimble that way because we had entities like cipa. But with that gone, I do worry that are we destined to unavoidably commit the sins of the past? And I hope we're not, and I really do hope not. But to see that collaborative effort across the 49th parallel, that just makes all the sense in the world to me. I mean, the fact that we air two different countries, it doesn't make any difference when it comes to safety. You have to dos what the right thing is. And that gave me a perspective also when I worked with Alliance Pipeline. The pipeline originates in northeastern British Columbia and it terminates near Chicago and multiple jurisdictions provincially, statewide, and obviously federally too.

(00:42:25):

And we try our best to meet the highest level of regulatory governance, but not always that easy. And that's just one company. And here you are, you're representing the pipeline safety trust and you're trying to bridge these gaps. And with a small staff, it's just so hard to do. But having the reality, unfortunate reality of what predicated the pipeline safety trust, I think that brings it back. This is why we're doing it. When we talk about a damage that could happen, well, it hasn't happened. We must be doing everything right. No, this did happen. We didn't do everything. We're still not doing everything that grounds people. You can't argue with that. But over the course of time, it's been 26 years since Bellingham happened, and I hate to think that memories fade, but they do. They do blur. And do you think that that's happening? Is it possible when I think of SEPA disappearing, is that possible? Are we destined to repeat ourselves?

Carl Weimer (00:43:45):

Yeah, hopefully not. I think there's torture bears like you and I that do remember and keep beating the drum and it picks up on younger people. CIPO was a pretty amazing organization. I work really closely with Patrick Smyth, who you mentioned, Jim, he, Brenda, Kenny, even had Brenda come and do a keynote speech at one of our conferences, which still was one of the better keynote speeches ever. I were having to convince my board of directors to have an industry person do one of our keynote speeches.

Mike Sullivan (00:44:18):

She was with a National energy board before then. So yeah, I remember. I know Brenda very well. Yeah,

Carl Weimer (00:44:22):

Great. And it was great. But there was nuggets that came out of all those interactions, and we tried to triage and we tried to be strategic. And that was one our best solutions working with cipa because one of the things that they asked us to do was to look at public engagement and look at metrics in Canada. And actually it was one of the few times we've taken money from the industry, from cipa, we had a joint agreement to do a study up there looking at what the public thinks about pipeline safety, what metrics they're looking for to tell them that pipelines are safer. Because I think everybody agreed that the more

the public actually understands about pipelines and what the industry and the regulators are doing, the more trust there is in the safety of those. And there's been some studies that have shown that.

(00:45:11):

So we did that study for cipa, and that led to the Canadian Standards Association moving forward on Zed two 60, which is a pipeline safety metrics standard. We use that to shame API to do something similar. So they're working on that in the US now. We brought people together on both sides of the border to talk about better public engagement. And API just a little over a year ago now has a standard now on public engagement that takes the public awareness stuff that you were talking about earlier and expands on that. So public awareness was really kind of a one way communication of what the industry and regulators thought. The public, it was important for the public to know, and all those things certainly were important, but it didn't really address how does the public learn about stuff they're interested in. So the new standard at A-P-I-A-P-I-R-P 1185 is all about engagement. How do pipeline companies better engage with the public? And it goes right to what you said, kind of the heart of our conferences. How do you get everybody in the room having discussions and coming to an understanding of things and those things live on, even though CPA started that lit the torch, I help move it along. Now there's people picking those things up and moving forward. So hopefully we aren't falling backwards, although I think that's normal. People keep wanting to know about the Bellingham story and people in Bellingham have moved on. People in Bellingham

Mike Sullivan (00:46:37):

Talk about it, probably a fact of people that just, they want to move on. We don't want to forget, forget

Carl Weimer (00:46:42):

Move's, don't want to keep living in trauma. The industry still visits us. The regulators still visit us. FMS brings their whole leadership team to walk the creek and hear the story. Marathon Pipeline brings their whole leadership team to Bellingham every year, every other year to walk the pipeline and hear the story. And a lot of the industry groups do that too. So while some people have kind of moved on, the industry still holds onto that as a touchstone of how do we make sure we're really making safety first, especially in this time where everybody's talking deregulation.

Mike Sullivan (00:47:20):

I've never been to Bellingham, and like you said, it's not far off the Canadian border, and I live in Calgary. I'm really not that far when you think 20 minute

Carl Weimer (00:47:29):

Flight into Abbotsford

Mike Sullivan (00:47:31):

And then just a little short drive. But yeah, I've never been, and it's something that it's a place that I wanted to visit and I had no idea that, well, obviously I won't call it a tour, but there's a touch point with industry officials and it's something that you put something in my mind here, so come on down, I'll

Carl Weimer (00:47:51):

Give it to

Mike Sullivan (00:47:52):

You. Yeah, well, I might bring some people with me too. I would be interested to do that. How many conferences has there been now? So this is 26 years later, but it didn't begin right away.

Carl Weimer (00:48:04):

Oh yeah. Boy, I don't know. I think there's been 18 or 20. We've had it every year. We took a couple of years off during COVID, tried to do some online conference instead of in-person, which was okay, they aren't as good as the in-person because part of the in person conferences all at conversations that go on over meals or in between sessions. But we've been trying to do it every year and trying to stick to the format. The last few years we've tried to introduce more interactive stuff. So let's put the industry and people in a room and talk about how do you cite a new pipeline? What would the public like to have happen during the citing of a new pipeline? We see that's where a lot of trust has been lost when the arguments over things like Keystone and there was lots of nonsense coming from both sides over both sides.

Mike Sullivan (00:48:57):

And that's the thing about the public engagement. It's great that the public is far more aware. And one of the measures of that, I think is when you see the public getting engaged about new pipelines, whether they don't want them or they don't want them here, they're not in my backyard. Banana build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone. There's that end of it too. Well, they are necessary. We do need these pipelines, the line that is the safest way to transport these hydrocarbons across great distances. Yes, it's true. When something happens, it could be catastrophic. And we certainly don't want that to happen. All kinds of measures are taken to make sure it doesn't happen, but we can always improve. It's kind of like traveling by air. It's the safest way to travel apparently from a statistical point of view. But when something happens, it's probably not going to be very good. The fact is the pipelines are safe, but when something like this happens, it's a horrible thing. It's horrific, and we can always improve.

Carl Weimer (00:50:06):

I'm always telling the industry you need to tell your story better because as you dig into integrity management or even damage prevention issues, the public doesn't see everything that's going on. And as they learn about all of the different risk analysis and stuff that goes on to counteract those things, it's amazing how that helps build trust.

Mike Sullivan (00:50:30):

It does. Even from my role here with utility safety partners, and I look at the data compared to many states that are highly populated states or even Eastern Canada, Ontario and Quebec, we don't have the numbers that in terms of locate requests that those other locations might have, but that doesn't matter to me. The number of locate requests doesn't matter. The number of notifications don't matter to me. What matters is reducing damages in relation to those notifications or locate requests. But again, even that is not measured unilaterally because reporting damages into dirt is voluntary, and we're not seeing that mandated damage reporting. So we're always looking ways to improve, but we're not comparing apples to apples all the time. So that's a hard one to manage. The fact that we're trying to improve though, and working more closely with landowners and regulated officials is good.

(00:51:35):

And I was talking before about the level of awareness of the public today is much higher than it was 25 years ago. And one way to measure that, as I was saying, was the protests perhaps before a pipeline is built or before it even goes to a hearing or they're just doing a sighting, not my backyard. That was never the case a long time ago, but it's routine now. Now where that organization comes from, is it professional protestors? To me, it doesn't matter. The fact is that it exists, that awareness exists, and perhaps we do need to do a better job. But when you look at the data, and again, just talking about Alberta, we'll receive half a million locate requests every year, and there hasn't been a significant damage here in Alberta in quite some time when there is a damage, it's usually not because there was no locate request, something else happened. That seems to be the case just about everywhere, which is a good thing. The damage that happened in Bellingham, the one I mentioned here in just outside of Edmonton many years ago, there was no locate request. Times have changed.

Carl Weimer (00:52:57):

I think that's one of the success stories over the last 25 years. If you look at the data across the board, the number of incidents happening because of damage is down. So the Common Ground Alliance and all those efforts have started moving the dial on that because it used to always be, if you looked at what was causing the most deaths from a pipeline, it was out third party damage. That's not the case. At least not in the US anymore.

Mike Sullivan (00:53:23):

It doesn't seem to be. And even on the call before you dig, that mean that changed, having that within the safety vernacular of anybody who was in the excavating industry or the pipeline industry. And now we've shifted to online click before you dig, and we found here Alberta, we did some analysis. Well, actually we can prevent damage even more by pushing people online because they can actually see where they're digging. And I'm digging right here. And they can identify their dig site because nobody knows better where they're digging than they are. They're not interpreting that to someone else over the phone. So we mandated the online locate requests for members and contractors here in Alberta a number of years ago. And Ontario just recently mandated that for homeowners too, you have to submit your locate request online because of that revelation that, okay, you know what?

(00:54:15):

Yes, a locate request reduces damage dramatically. A locate request online reduces it even more. So let's do that. So we're constantly improving, and that's a good thing. The data is improving. The data in terms of mapping underground assets and where they are through polygon rather than by grid or township or whatever it might be, is far better today than it was then. There's been a lot of advancements in every faction, not just engagement and awareness, which wouldn't have happened, I don't think, without organizations like the Pipeline Safety Trust or the Common Ground Alliance, the Canadian Common Ground Alliance, and even the One Call Centers facility notification centers we call ourselves today, there is that new Facility Notifications Center Association, FNCA, that emerged a couple of years ago where we're working better now in a borderless approach, like listening to each other, not just on how the locate request process should work, but on human resource issues, on data management, on selecting partners, in terms of locate request software.

(00:55:27):

We're just improving by leaps and bounds. And none of that happens without engagement. And you've been at the forefront of this really since 1999, willingly, unwillingly, knowingly, unknowingly, and you've seen a lot happen. What do you think is next here? I mean, we've come a long way. We don't want to be

forgotten. Incidents like this can't be forgotten, and I appreciate, yes, I am one of those torch waivers or flag waivers, whatever you want to call it. Don't forget about us. And yet we're not seeing career people anymore in damage prevention. Young people come in and then they go somewhere else. They go into, and careers are short today compared to the baby boomers perhaps. Where do you think we're going to be here in the next five to 10 years? Is that going to be challenge?

Carl Weimer (00:56:24):

Yeah, I think that's a challenge for everybody. I mean, you look at the two of us, lots of gray hair here, and I think that's the industry in general is aging and aging out, and it's getting harder and harder to get people in. I know there's a young professionals group in both sides of the borders trying to encourage people into the pipeline industry. So that's an issue. I think the other thing that really has changed in the last, oh, 10 years, maybe even less, is how people define safety. Because it used to be when we started and our total focus was on pipe integrity and how do you prevent pipe problems? And as you were saying now, a new pipeline's going in and you have protestors, well, they're not really thinking about pipe integrity and safety. They're thinking about climate change. So what they're, they're protesting is how the pipe is allowing climate change to happen and the safety around climate change issues, which is a very different thing to try to wrap your head around than corrosion and things like that. And to some degree, I think that drives who wants to get in and out of the industry and who wants to do that? So much kind of a negative connotation about oil and gas these days too, because we haven't done a very good job as a society defining what a transition means. If you ask the Sierra Club, it's, we need to get off oil and gas in four years, and if you ask the industry over the next hundred years, we need to transition. Well, that doesn't build a lot of mutual understanding.

Mike Sullivan (00:58:00):

No, it doesn't. And yeah, that's a totally different topic for sure. But you're absolutely right. It's interesting. When I was working with the National Energy Board and I was partisan some regulatory hearings on pipelines that, okay, this company wants to build this pipeline in this area. And there were hearings and there was environmental portion of it, there was a land portion and then the landowner engagement portion of that hearing. And there was always time set aside for that. But that time grew and grew and grew and became a very big part of any regulatory hearing. The same I think is going to happen for the climate initiative climate change, and what is the effect of this pipeline or that pipeline or the amount of throughput on climate change, and how are we going to be able to address this and what's going to be the offset to it? I see that happening. I can't see the industry getting away from it or the regulator getting away from it. There haven't been that many new pipelines cited in Canada. There's other challenges associated with that. But I do see that happening and potentially in the US as well because of that. Your next conference is coming up?

Carl Weimer (00:59:18):

Yeah, no, November 13th and 14th in New Orleans of all places

Mike Sullivan (00:59:22):

And have all the conferences taken place in New Orleans?

Carl Weimer (00:59:26):

They have, they've all been in New Orleans. We went down there initially right after the big hurricane hit down there. We had a board member who had went down there with Habitat for Humanity and helped

rebuild homes. And he says, new Orleans could really use some help, so let's hold our conference there and get 200 people in to spend some money on dinner and stuff. And we love it and have been ever since.

Mike Sullivan (00:59:49):

Yeah, I think that was the first one I went to actually after Katrina. And yeah, now that I think about it. And I remember being in a cab on my way to the hotel from the airport and the person driving the cab said, what are you here for? And I explained what I was here for. Says, well, thanks for having it here. I said, well, it wasn't my decision, but I'm happy to be here. And they said it was, excuse me, it was a big boost. So good on you for continuing to do that. I don't know if I'll be able to make it down this year, but I certainly would love to go down again and I'm going to extend an invitation to you now or anybody else in the pipeline safety trust to come to our next conference. It won't be until 2027.

(01:00:29):

We hold 'em every two years. And it's all dedicated on damage prevention, obviously. But this is a story that, and drive the pipeline safety, trust what it's done that I don't want to see disappear. And much like what happened in near Edmonton back in 1979, we can't forget that these things have happened and I want to be able to do my part as big or small as it is to help promote and keep it alive. And so once again, Carl, thank you for joining me today. We could talk for hours about this and I, there's so much more to talk about. There really is. And maybe we'll do it again someday. But again, thank you for joining me today. This has been, I've learned something more than I did last time when I knew about this. So been really been my pleasure having you here. Thank you.

Carl Weimer (01:01:26):

Yeah, thanks for having me on the podcast and come on down and I'll give you a tour of Whatcom Creek and we can talk about, I'd love to learn more about Qlik before you dig because that's not something that has caught on down here much yet.

Mike Sullivan (01:01:39):

No, it hasn't. And I'd be happy to chat with you about it. And I'm going to reach out to you. I have an idea for getting some people down there and I'll reach out to my chair. Maybe we'll make something happen because there's a new younger crop of people that are coming up and they need to be aware of what we're doing, what the movement is. It's not just you need to locate request, it's the damage prevention process is enormous and it begins long before a locate request begins and it ends long after it happens. So yeah, I have some ideas and I'll reach out to you for sure.

Carl Weimer (01:02:16):

Great. I really appreciate your parallel efforts on safety over the same timeframe we've done.

Mike Sullivan (01:02:22):

Yeah, it's been fun. Yeah, I think so. It's been good and there's lots more to do and I'll be chatting you again soon. Thanks again. Alright, thank you. Bye. Now that's going to wrap things up on this episode of the Safety Moment podcast. I really want to thank Carl Weimer from the Pipeline Safety Trust for joining me. I've had this plan to have Carl on an episode for a very long time, and we finally got a chance to do that. And just a sensational guest, a sensational career, what he's been able to do with the Pipeline Safety Trust. I also want to thank our producers stories and strategies, and I do hope to 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 and Facebook and LinkedIn. If you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, you can email us at info@utilitysafety.ca and just put podcast and big bold letters in the subject header. We'll know what it's all about. I'm Mike Sullivan, the president of Utility Safety Partners. Click to know what's above and below. One click costs you nothing, not clicking that could cost you everything.