

The Safety Moment Podcast

Host: Mike Sullivan | Guests: Ron Laidman & Iain Stables

Announcer (00:02):

You're 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 (00:16):

Welcome to year number five of The Safety Moment Podcast. Thanks for joining us. We really appreciate everybody coming on and selecting the podcast to listen to over the years. Certainly appreciate it. My guests today are Mr. Ron Laidman from Inertia and Iain Stables from ATCO, and we're going to be talking about the Alternate Locate Provider Program. This has been a topic of previous podcasts, and today we're just talking about it again, but only because it's such an amazing topic and operationally it's had a massive impact. I shouldn't use that word in a damage prevention sense, but we have made a dent — maybe not even that word. The ALP is making its way in the damage prevention world here in Alberta, and it's getting some recognition. But anyway, thanks for joining me again. And for those of the great unwashed who don't know who you are, let me start with Ron Laidman.

(01:16):

If you don't mind introducing yourself, Ron.

Ron Laidman (01:18):

Yeah. I am an outside consultant who's been working with USP and the consortium owners across Alberta to help get ALP up and running. And it's been two and a half years now that I've been working with you guys and I've very much integrated into everything USP at this point — everything from getting the program up and running to working with everybody, all the stakeholders on the rollout, and then since then on the assessments and various program advancements and things like that over the last few years. So it's been quite the journey, and to know Mike and Iain and many others very well here. So it's great to be here again.

Mike Sullivan (02:01):

Affectionately known as the man who fell from the sky, actually. Yeah. And I actually have that in some presentations. Nobody knows what the hell I'm talking about. But no, great to have you back here, Ron. And over to you, Iain Stables, the man with two I's.

Iain Stables (02:14):

Yeah. Hey, Mike and Ron. I'm Iain Stables, Senior Specialist Damage Prevention for ATCO Energy Systems. I have spent the better — and some would say the best — part of my life in the damage prevention world for 20-some-plus years and have been incredibly lucky to experience the journey of damage prevention from a locator to working on something like the ALP.

Mike Sullivan (02:39):

Well, and you've really seen that full gamut. I mean, you've been in this industry as a locator. When you started out, how many years ago is that, Iain? Not to date yourself, but let's date —

Iain Stables (02:48):

Yourself. Yeah, it's going on 22 years ago, I started as a... Well, that was when I ended. So probably about 25 years ago, I started as a locator that didn't know what I was getting into or the journey it would take me on. And —

Mike Sullivan (03:03):

The ALP, obviously, it's the next big thing. I mean, we're seeing that now. And so you've seen quite a journey, as you said — a big change in the locating space. Well, guys, thanks for joining me again. And we've had ALP discussions a few times on the Safety Moment, and we're only doing so because it keeps generating more and more interest. When I look at the downloads of the Safety Moment Podcast, I mean, safety is a hard sell. And we know we're not going to compete with Joe Rogan anytime soon, although I'm sure he's paying attention. But if you look at the ALP episodes we've done, they are by far the most popular of all the episodes we've done — a lot of downloads. And there's a lot of interest. And if you look at where people are listening, it's all over. It's not just here in Alberta.

(03:57):

It's all over Canada. It's all over the United States and different parts of the world. It's really been a topic of interest and with good reason. And that's why we're here to talk about it today. We are into the second year — well into the second year — of ALP. Just a little bit of a history: the ALP began as an option in August of 2024, and it was almost midway through August of 2024. But before that, it was a two-and-a-half-year project to get it off the ground. And we've talked about that. I don't want to rehash that, but here we are about 18 months, roughly, from that day in August. And we've seen a considerable uptick, which in my view underlines the comfort, I think, of the digging community in selecting the ALP. There were those first people who did so in August 2024, and it would appear they keep coming back, and it's only grown.

(05:09):

So I want to talk about that today. And what have we learned so far? I mean, I guess from you, Iain, as a utility — gas distribution utility here in Alberta — what have we learned so far about the ALP?

Iain Stables (05:25):

Oh, I think we've learned a lot, Mike, and we're continuing to learn. But I think the biggest thing I've learned is there is a strong appetite and interest in the ALP program. We're seeing that from the contractors that were somewhat reluctant at first, but them saying once they start using the ALP, that they will never go away from it. So I think we all expected that there would be interest in it, but I think the thing that stands out to me the most is the amount of interest in it. And not just here within Alberta — we're seeing it all across North America — that there is a lot of interest in the ALP and what we're doing here in Alberta to make the locating world and the challenges faced in the locating world better.

Mike Sullivan (06:11):

And what about you, Ron? I mean, you have a bit of a different perspective. Obviously, you're well ingrained into what's happening here in Alberta, but you also have that perspective of what's happening in Ontario. And I'm sure people are reaching out to you with interest. What are you seeing? What have you seen in terms of what have we learned so far?

Ron Laidman (06:29):

Yeah, I think the biggest thing is the program's working, and I think if I could take anything away from it — you've touched on a few things. We talked about the increased volumes. I know we're going to talk about damages and the low damage rates we've seen too. We have new utility owners who are looking to join on. We have, including Rogers, who joined on last year.

Mike Sullivan (06:49):

Yes.

Ron Laidman (06:49):

We have more applicants who continue to apply in terms of interested companies who are trying to get on board. We have more locators and the locator count's grown. Again, a lot of things we're going to talk about here. So the interest — we have companies coming from outside of Alberta now trying to get involved in the program as well. So all this together, we're seeing great outcomes, reduced damages, increased usage.

Mike Sullivan (07:10):

Great outcomes, great —

Ron Laidman (07:12):

Damages. Yeah. I don't know what else we can ask for from the program. It's not perfect, but hey, what else can you really ask for?

Mike Sullivan (07:20):

Yeah, no, I think you're right. To be honest, I don't know if I knew what to expect. I think we've been so entrenched in the ALP and looking at the granularity of it, trying to make improvements and adjusting to questions, that I don't really recall if I had a vision as to the impact it would have and to see where it is going, especially now. If I look at, for example, January 2026 data compared to January 2025, when we were really in our infancy still — the ALP kicked off at the tail end of the summer of '24, and it had some impact. There's no question about it. And people were choosing that option, but then you get into January when the digging season is — we're not even in there yet — and there were 3.3% of all locate requests that selected the ALP option, and that was good.

(08:19):

That's like 620 or something like that. That's not bad, right? That's an interesting impact. But then a year later, January 2026 — and I just got the data a few weeks ago — 13.3% of all excavations chose the ALP option. That to me says, "I trust this. This works." Now, if you look at a percentage increase, that's like almost a 300% increase compared to the year before. And the locate requests for the province are pretty much static year over year. That's a real increase. That's not like, "Oh, we had that many more locate

requests." No, we didn't. We may have had a bit less, a little bit more, but pretty static. That tells me a lot. And we're still at the beginning of this. I don't think we've gotten entrenched yet in the whole damage prevention process. What do you make of that in terms of that uptick?

(09:17):

Iain, I'll go to you.

Iain Stables (09:18):

I think when we launched it, Mike, we would've been really, really happy with 5% of the excavators using it. So I think, to Ron's point, what it says to me is it's working and people are seeing the value and, more importantly, the benefits of it. People wouldn't be using it — it wouldn't be growing — if it wasn't working or addressing a need in the excavating community.

Mike Sullivan (09:43):

What about you, Ron? I mean, what does that data tell you?

Ron Laidman (09:47):

Yeah. Well, again, it tells me it's working, but I look at things like the amount of locators registered in the program — it's almost doubled since that time that you're referencing right now. The companies who have been involved have stayed in the program for the most part and they've doubled down and they're staying involved. So everything's pointing to: it's working. There's still improvements to be made, and we'll talk about that, I'm sure, as we get going here, but it's showing that people have interest, people have faith in it, they're trusting it, and every piece of data we have is pointing to that right now. So it's great to see.

Mike Sullivan (10:24):

And I think it shows us that the digging community — those who are selecting the option — it's settling in. They're settling in, right?

Ron Laidman (10:31):

Yeah.

Mike Sullivan (10:32):

Yeah. And there was always my assumption that the more locate service providers we had — just in general — that the cost they are charging to the digging community would begin to almost self-regulate. And I don't have a window to that. I don't know if you have a window to that, but maybe you do. And if you do, do you think that's happening?

Iain Stables (10:58):

I think it's happening somewhat. I mean, I think it varies from locate to locate, but I think if it hasn't happened across all the province yet, it will in time, because I think a lot of our vendors and our contractors are still determining how this applies to them, how to interact with it, how to use it, how to charge for it. So I do think it will in time bring costs closer across the province, but more importantly, make it available to everyone when that cost starts becoming relevant to the size and scope of the job.

Mike Sullivan (11:32):

Yep. And when I look at the number — you mentioned it a few moments ago, Ron — the number of locate service providers that we are seeing now on our website, we have a few more that have just been added. That is obviously creating a lot more capacity for Alberta, for the digging community, and a lot more locator capacity and should be diminishing the locate delays. Iain, are you seeing that? I mean, it's only been one full year, but are you seeing that in terms of locate delays? Are we seeing a reduction, or is it too early?

Iain Stables (12:13):

No, I can speak on behalf of ATCO. Last year, our completion times were amongst the best we've ever had. And I think a large part of that is because of the ALP, as some of the work that was typically a really, really heavy drain on locate resources was done through the ALP, allowing our locators to get to those other requests. So yes, we have seen improved completion timelines because of the ALP.

Mike Sullivan (12:41):

And when we talk about — okay — there have been greater than 50,000 times now that the ALP has been selected by the person submitting the locate request. Now, that doesn't mean 50,000 locates; that means actually more than 50,000 locates. Both of you guys — I mean, I'll ask Ron first — generally, how many locates more is that? Is it like 50,000 plus 10%? Is it 20%? I mean, it's hard to tell. I get that, but generally, what are you thinking?

Ron Laidman (13:11):

Man, that's one of the more complex questions, but you could make the —

Mike Sullivan (13:16):

Argument — you're a complex guy, Ron. I think you can answer.

Ron Laidman (13:19):

So you could make the argument in general in the locate community — if you're putting in a project ticket or some sort of larger ticket, which these are typically going to be — they could have been made up of at least three other locates, probably more like 10 more locates within there. And then within there, multiple utilities on top of that too. So from an actual locate count, from how the utility owners might look at it, you're talking far more than even 10 times at that point. So it's a matter of complexity and the amount of work, and it's not just about the ticket itself — it's about how complex those tickets really are and how much time they take. So it's really hard to put a number on it, but it's way more than 50,000 at this point.

Iain Stables (14:00):

You —

Mike Sullivan (14:00):

See the same thing, Iain?

Iain Stables (14:01):

Yeah. Again, if I just base it on some of my historical stats, especially related to the fibre builds that we've done by the traditional means, we've typically seen a lot more locate requests. So I would say that because of the ALP, the numbers may be lower, but the

work is significantly larger than the 50,000 locate requests that we can circle and say, "Yep, this was an ALP request."

Mike Sullivan (14:26):

So when you think of that — let's say it's 50,000, maybe 75,000 actual locates, right? And then you think of the damage ratio. I would love to be able to capture that, actually — the real number of locates. I don't think we can, but there's probably a formula out there within some of your background. But if you think about that — what we've seen so far is three reported damages. Have there been more damages? Nothing that's been reported to us. We don't know, but there have been three reported damages on ALP work sites. But when you look at the damage ratio of what I will refer to as conventional locating — the historical locating — and the CCGA damage information reporting tool report, the DIRT report, we're looking at — I don't have it up on screen with me right now, but it's something in the nature of 2.7 damages per thousand locate requests, and I think it's higher per thousand notifications or vice versa.

(15:30):

I can't remember. But now we look at the ALP and it's something like 0.06 damages per thousand notifications. Now, I don't even think that's accurate because one ALP request could mean two, 1.5, three locates. So the damage ratio is even less than what we are reporting. And if Utility Safety Partners and all of our members and the Common Ground Alliance in Canada, the Common Ground Alliance in the US — if that's the objective to reduce damages, then it would appear to me that the ALP and other programs like it are a best practice. At some point, I think we have to look at that and approach the damage prevention process in Alberta and approach the Canadian Common Ground Alliance and submit a transaction request to say, "Let's incorporate the documentation for ALP into the best practice." You think we're going to head there? Because it's data driven, right?

Iain Stables (16:42):

I think some industries are already starting to go that way, Mike. I think we're seeing it with the excavators that are using the ALP — they don't have interest in going back. I can see the day where the ALP, especially for complex large jobs, becomes the preferred method of completing locates. And I think the reason for that is there's so much more that goes into a locate than just marking the utilities. There's understanding the excavation, understanding how they're approaching. I've said for years, communication is the key to damage prevention. And I think that's part of the reason the ALP has been successful — by the very nature of it, communication is built into it. So I do see a day where the ALP becomes the norm and the way to continue with the reductions of damages. I don't have the timeline, but I do see it.

Mike Sullivan (17:36):

I think you're right. And what about you, Ron? Do you see this becoming a best practice? And we'll talk about where that could go after, but do you see that it could become a best practice?

Ron Laidman (17:47):

I think any time you're reducing the complexity of the system — you're taking out things that are causing more complexity and you're creating buckets like that, which is

essentially what we're doing with the ALP program — you're making it safer, you're making it better for everything else that's getting done, and you're making it safer for that bucket that you're able to focus on too. So really, it's a win-win. So why wouldn't this turn into something, whether it's a variation of what we're doing or the actual program itself? It needs to go this way as an industry, in my opinion. So how that looks, who knows? But we've created a framework at least where we can build off of this.

Mike Sullivan (18:26):

I agree. And talking at the top of our discussion here, Iain — you were saying that in 22 years you've had that history of being a locator and your career progression. And looking back to one of our previous episodes where we talked about ALP, I remember you saying for decades, locating didn't change. We have all kinds of changes to the upfront of the process — the submission of a locate request and all those things, mapping and all of that — but locating really didn't change. This is the biggest change in Alberta for locating and marking and perhaps the damage prevention process in decades. And I still think we're at the beginning of that change, but everything being data driven — everything we do is data driven — I do see us moving to a best practice. And then as the journey continues — probably long after I'm gone — the way the relationship between best practice and standards and regulation and legislation, those things tend to work their way into standards or whatever.

(19:40):

And if a standard is incorporated by reference into legislation, then it becomes law. And I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but I think we need to look at that, because what we've been working on here in Alberta is the foundation of change, really. And if we see what it could possibly become, I think you have to keep that in mind as you develop it and as you build it, because that foundation can't change. You can't go back and change the history of it. So where does this go? I mean, it'll continue to be an option in Alberta, but I guess one of the questions I have in terms of where this could go — do you know, and I don't know, but do you know if the regulators are paying attention to this? Are they seeing it? Iain, maybe you're closer to that than I am.

Iain Stables (20:34):

I think they're aware of it, but I don't think they're paying close attention to it, because locating has typically always fallen upon the shoulders of the utility providers. And I do think we have a relatively small sample size, but I think — and Ron can probably speak to this better — I think where we'll see change and where we'll see the regulators paying attention is we're not just onboarding locate companies into the program. We're starting to see a number of excavation companies see the value of learning to locate, having that ability internally. And that's the part that's exciting to me — when we started this, it was all the locate companies in Alberta. But now that you're seeing excavators come in, I think that's going to be the catalyst for change — when more excavators come in and show us that this is the better and safer way.

(21:31):

I don't know if you have anything to add on that, Ron.

Ron Laidman (21:33):

Yeah. And I agree with you, Iain. And I'd say the addition of utility owners — more utility owners involved in the program itself, and not just as a utility owner, but as an alternate locate service provider as well, because we're starting to see that interest coming in too. So when you have every aspect of the industry starting to work within this program, in my mind, that's just a clear path then. The regulators, every stakeholder has bought into it at that point. So let's figure out something that makes this more official, makes this work from here. So yeah, we're getting there.

Mike Sullivan (22:09):

We talk about regulators and the interest it has and the impact it's having — there has been interest well beyond Alberta, right? I mean, presentations have been given in different parts of the country, whether it's the CCGA or other provinces that have had interest. Manitoba has interest. I know there's potential for us to deliver a presentation in Manitoba in the near future. There was a presentation in Dallas last September. Georgia reached out to me a couple of times over the last six or seven months with questions, and they've had something similar, but not on the same scale as the ALP. And then just last week, Illinois — one of their state departments reached out and had a call with me, a Teams call — because they are experiencing the exact same things that we were experiencing here, which is locate delays. I mean, they get winter just like we do, and they had not moved to a consortium methodology, but they have heard through the state one-call centre called JULIE in Illinois about what we're doing here in Alberta.

(23:28):

And that came through the Facility Notification Centers Association — I'm on a fairly new organization and talked about in a different podcast, but I'm on the board of directors for that organization. They've been hearing anecdotally and through other presentations about what we're doing here in Alberta. So the interest is growing and we're doing something right, but as one of you guys said earlier, we're not done yet. There's more to do. So where does this go next? I mean, we've had a quick chat — we had one meeting, I think, with transmission pipeline companies just to say, "Hey, is this potentially applicable, or a variation of it applicable, to the transmission pipeline industry?" And that's one potential avenue, but where else can this go? What's next?

Iain Stables (24:23):

I think where we see it next — and it surprised me with all the podcasts we've done, all the socializing, the presentations — there's still a lot of excavators that have never heard of it. So I think what we're going to see in the next little while is more and more excavators come into the program, not locate companies, but excavators, because I think it's getting out there. They're starting to hear and see the benefits. It's the same reason, Mike, that I was asked to speak at the American Gas Association. They're hearing positive things from this. So I think the next step is we're going to see more excavators. And as that happens — I think Ron mentioned it — we're going to see more utility owners come in. And I think that's going to be the natural way this grows over the next little while, as there are going to be more interested parties that have never really been a part of the locating world, but now this is available to them.

(25:15):

So that's where I think we go in the next couple of years. And as we all know, we're going to continue to refine the process because there are some things we can do behind the scenes to make it easier for people entering the program and also with the ticket transmission. So I think on our end, we're going to continually do the year-over-year improvement cycle, and we're going to see excavators knocking at Ron's door saying, "How do I do this?"

Mike Sullivan (25:41):

And we do have a planned meeting coming up in April, right? I mean, we're going to get a bunch of utilities together and talk about this.

Iain Stables (25:49):

Absolutely. I mean, from the outset, Mike, we never intended this to be perfect. We always meant this to grow and improve based on feedback from the locators, the excavators, and anyone involved. And that's our goal — making this as workable as possible for the people that are using it, making sure that they feel engaged and listened to, and that it's working for them. If it's not working for them, people aren't going to come to it.

Mike Sullivan (26:16):

Ron, maybe talk about the digging community. So we've touched on that — obviously that's probably the next avenue of expansion and adoption. And is it every facet of the digging community, or is it more so the road builders, those that are doing shallow works? And we have a massive fibre build happening throughout North America — not just here in Alberta — and we've seen a huge uptick in the ALP for the fibre build, but it's more than that. And so where do you see this going in terms of the digging community adopting —

Ron Laidman (26:51):

This? I think, to your point, every part of the digging community is going to benefit from this. Right now, the low-hanging fruit is more of the fibre builds and the companies who are dealing with the drilling and some of the excavation on that work, because they're seeing firsthand the benefit of having a locator on staff or working with an ALP locator to be able to just stay ahead of their work and stay on track and not have any downtime — that whole control over the process. On the larger builds and for the bigger digging community, it's just a natural next step from here. Why not? You're going to have control over your projects. You're going to have that risk minimisation from downtime, from things going wrong, from not being able to get clarifications on your drawings or sketches, or all the things that come up that Iain's touched on today already.

(27:42):

These are all things that happen. They're really costly to the industry. So ALP solves that at a pretty minimal cost to the excavator. So why wouldn't it go that path? It's a natural path for this to grow from here. And it's a natural place for us to gain more locate capacity as well,

(28:00):

when the excavators themselves start to increase their capacity and are able to do locates. It just makes the broader industry stronger as well.

Mike Sullivan (28:09):

One of the things you've been helping us with, Ron, as well, is municipalities. And in Alberta, we don't have that common legislation that says if you own buried utilities, you must register with USP, and if you're going to dig, you must contact us for a locate. We have partial legislation governing some buried utilities, but not all of them. Now, municipalities — we are fortunate to have a number of municipalities that have registered their assets with us, but by the same token, there are a number that haven't. And it's not because they don't want to — they kind of don't know where their assets are. And that's not a slight against those municipalities; it's just the way it is. And there has been some discussion about using ALP as a means for those municipalities to find their assets, but potentially — and this may be a bit of a reach — potentially also to become an alternate locate service provider in the process.

(29:09):

And that could be a revenue generator for those municipalities. Now, this is an area of discussion that has been bandied around back and forth. Our government relations people have been involved. You have a bit more of a lens outside of Alberta. Do you see that potential, or is that still too vague — a bit of vapour in terms of a next step?

Ron Laidman (29:38):

I'd say we've done some work already to try to quantify things and to figure out what this looks like for municipalities. I'd say it's still a step for them because it's just outside-the-box thinking for what would be a traditional municipal approach. But the upside — you mentioned a lot of it. You've got the opportunity — if a project's in town, and if you're an owner involved in the program as well — you can reduce the cost of your own locating by making sure there's an ALP locator. You can bring people on board in-house, become an ALP provider yourself to provide locates for these projects coming through as well. And you could capitalise on it by having the ability to get your records up to date and to find everything. So there's a lot of upside that we see. We see this happening in Ontario to a certain degree, but it's a different environment as well.

(30:25):

So it's pretty unique in Alberta — how do we leverage this program to get people more on board and to bring everything up to a certain level? So it's there. I don't know if it's a this-year thing, but it's definitely got the potential long term.

Mike Sullivan (30:41):

I see it too. And it's still, again, a bit vague to me, but it's comforting in a way to hear what you're saying there. And you have a broader lens on this than I do. And I want to go back to damages. We have seen a reduction in damages, and you touched on it a little bit. The communication factor between the locator on site and whether it's the foreman or the person operating the heavy equipment — what is it, do you think, that is actually reducing those damages? Is it just that? The capacity to communicate and have a person on site who's not rushing from job to job?

Iain Stables (31:23):

I think there's a couple of things, but I do think it comes down a lot to the communication, because what we're seeing — and the feedback I've got — is these locators that are completing the locates as part of ALPs are not viewed as just a random

locator. They're part of the crew. They're part of the success of the job. And through that, we're seeing the locators better understand the needs of the excavator or the requirements that they have. If they want paint every foot as opposed to every three feet, they're doing that. So I really do think it's a relationship. But maybe more importantly, we're seeing excavators — and we thought this might happen, but it's good to see it — we're seeing excavators really take ownership of the locate process and part of that is ensuring they're hydrovacating properly, because they're seeing the benefits of the ALP. And I think the reason we're seeing the success is they don't want to be excluded from it because of incidents.

(32:22):

So I really do think — I wish I could point to a technical spec we had, or the magic bullet that people came up with, right? But I really do think when you get two people that know each other and are invested in each other's outcome — I think, from my perspective, that is the success of it. Of course, we have all the requirements in the background, the training. And let's be honest, a lot of these locate companies that have started doing this are doing incredible work, but I really think it's their ability to build that relationship with the excavator and point out the hazards and the potential things to be aware of.

Mike Sullivan (33:00):

That's my guess as to what's happening too. You talk about that relationship — if I'm the excavator and I select somebody from USP's website, that's who I want to do the work with at this time. If I have a good experience, I'm going to go back to them.

(33:15):

And if I keep having that good experience, I'm going to keep going back to them. And after a while, the price is almost irrelevant because I know the service I'm getting is really good. Ron, I'm going to go back to you for a second here. Something we've talked about before, but I want to touch on it again for somebody who may be just listening for the first time. When a locate service provider applies or wants to register as an ALSP, maybe just walk everybody through the process. In a short couple of minutes, what does that look like?

Ron Laidman (33:50):

Yeah, so it's a multi-stage process. There's information you obviously review on the website before you go through it. You put in a submission for a request for assessment. It then gets triggered in our system to start the process. There's an initial review just to make sure there's nothing completely red-flag that would prevent you from making it through the process. And assuming that's okay — which hasn't been the case for really many companies because you've obviously done your research before you've applied — then it goes into a detailed submission where we've developed a whole assessment program, a registration assessment program, in the background that we are assessing each applicant against, based on various business, technical, quality, and training requirements. So we're going through each of these companies. They're submitting the supporting documentation. We are reviewing the context around it too and understanding their backgrounds and their operations.

(34:44):

So it's really a give-and-take thing where you give us the information, but then we talk it through and we try to figure out what you're actually doing and your understanding of things. And we often end up working with the applicant too, to help them get their programs up to a certain level before final approval as well. So it's not just put your submission in and you're done. If it's not right, it's very much a, "Hey, we're trying to increase the capacity and the quality of the industry out there. We're going to work with you to get things through." So I think it's been a pretty clean process for the most part, and it can take anywhere from a month to multiple months to get through the process as well, depending on how things go.

Mike Sullivan (35:29):

And so a person or a locate service provider who's going to go through that process — they first have to take that training, the locating and marking training. And that doesn't mean that I've never done any locating before and once I've done that I can be a locator. That's more of a confirming-you-know-what-you're-doing kind of training, right?

Ron Laidman (35:46):

Yeah.

Mike Sullivan (35:47):

And then following that, there's the assessment that you're carrying out. And then assuming they get through all that — which could be a month or multiple months, as you just said — then there's also the orientation with the participating members. And that is equally challenging and time-consuming, is it not?

Ron Laidman (36:06):

Yeah. So that's a good point. So I just talked about the company itself getting registered to be able to provide these locates. Then your locators need to go through it as well. So they would've gone through that training you talked about and then orientation with the owners, and then registration for each of the individual locators working for you as well. So you're signing off as a company that they are competent based on your programs and your training protocols, but there is an extra check with the utilities as well to make sure that they're getting the extra information and orientation. So once all that's done, the company can bring people into the program, and in and out of the program — locators can be trained and brought on and oriented to be able to provide locates for the company.

Mike Sullivan (36:51):

Thanks for that, by the way. And the reason I wanted to have you go through that is I get that question a lot: what does it take? And I say, "Well, here you go to the website, everything's there." Verbally or in an email, in a nutshell, here it is. But the reason why — and maybe you can touch on this, you're the utility owner — the reason for that is to maintain that level of integrity with what you already had. And so maybe you can talk to that. This was hard to put together, and that's why it took two and a half years to launch it.

Iain Stables (37:28):

Yeah, it really was. And right from the get-go, Mike — we've talked about this before — we were not willing to jeopardise the integrity of the locate process. So there was a lot

of work done to ensure that when these people are approved, the excavation community can have confidence that these people have been vetted and are competent to do their job. And we also, as a utility owner with the orientations, wanted to make sure that we set up any of these ALP-approved locators so that they have the same training, the same support, access to the same things that our current locators do. So we really mirrored our traditional contracts with a little bit of changes. And I think the major difference is rather than all our procurement departments doing all the checks, we have Ron doing those on behalf of the ALP, but it's a similar process to whether you want to be a small company doing ALPs or work for the consortium directly.

(38:26):

We really tried to mirror that process and ensure that nothing was jeopardised and that people would have faith in the product at the end of it.

Mike Sullivan (38:35):

I can't wait to get the next report. I mean, we're almost at the end of February now, and I'm anxious to get the next report showing me year over year — what's the increase for February '26 over '25? And that begins to just write the next chapter of the ALP. I really think it does — that adoption rate, the trust in the ALP. And maybe one last question before we go here: putting the ALP together wasn't easy. And we looked around the world, we made some decisions, and we wanted to have it mirror some things we did here in Alberta that were similar — same as the GD201 process — and we did all that. Do you think it would've been possible without Utility Safety Partners' involvement, or the one-call centre? Whether another state or province is looking at this, is it possible to do without the facility notification centre's involvement, or is it necessary?

Iain Stables (39:43):

Mike, I think you could, if you wanted to go that way. But just speaking from my experience with this, having — in this case — Utility Safety Partners involved, we were able to ensure that we engaged all stakeholders, and that was important to us. We didn't want to just present, "Hey, this is what the utility owners are saying is the next greatest thing." We wanted to involve all the stakeholders, and partnering with the One Call Centre enabled us to do that. And Mike, you were involved — you were able to reach out to a lot of different stakeholders that we probably wouldn't have thought to involve. So I think it can be done, but I wouldn't see why you wouldn't. The success of this is the involvement, the number of people that contributed to it. And I think that is why the product we have to date has been working — because we involved the people that know all aspects of a locate and the excavation.

Mike Sullivan (40:41):

I think you're right. The partnership, bringing in the partners and safety to do this, it made it easier. I don't think there's any magic way to do it — every way is, as a friend of mine used to say, "All roads lead to Walmart, just pick one." And we picked the one that we picked. But I see great things ahead. There are great things behind us with ALP. I see great things ahead of us for ALP and who knows what's to come. But I'm really glad that we were able to do this again, have you guys on the podcast to talk about this, to kick off our fifth season. And I suspect you'll be back again to talk more about our favourite subject. But guys, if you have any last words, please share them now.

Iain Stables (41:37):

All I have to say is if you're listening to this and you've got questions, reach out to USP about the ALP. We want to make it known to you and we want to answer any of your questions or concerns you have. Thanks, Mike.

Ron Laidman (41:49):

And I will reiterate that. By all means, reach out. We're here to help. We've got a wealth of knowledge here between the consortium, USP, myself, and everyone here. So onwards and upwards.

Mike Sullivan (42:02):

You heard it right here, folks. We'll put Iain's and Ron's phone numbers on our website and they'll... No, no. If you do have questions, reach out to us at info@utilitysafety.ca and put Alternate Locate Provider or ALP in bold letters in the subject line, and it'll reach these gentlemen and myself. So thanks again, guys. And I look forward to a very interesting and safe year ahead with the ALP. Thanks. Thanks, everyone. That's going to wrap things up on this episode of The Safety Moment Podcast. I want to thank our producer, Stories and Strategies, and also Mr. Iain Stables and Ron Laidman for joining me. 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](https://twitter.com/utility_safety). We're also on Instagram and Facebook and LinkedIn. And if you'd like to send us a note, please do.

(42:57):

Maybe you have an episode idea — you can email us at info@utilitysafety.ca. Even if you have a question about this episode, you can email us at info@utilitysafety.ca and put "podcast" in the subject header, and that'll make sure it gets to one of us. 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? Well, that could cost you everything.