

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 house, Mike Sullivan.

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

Scott, always good to see you, man. How you doing?

Scott Landes ([00:18](#)):

Great. Same here. Good to see you too.

Mike Sullivan ([00:21](#)):

We used to see each other a lot more. And is it good that we don't see each other as often or is it ... I don't know.

Scott Landes ([00:28](#)):

No. No, it's bad, but it's a lot less fun not seeing you.

Mike Sullivan ([00:33](#)):

It is a lot less fun. I

Scott Landes ([00:35](#)):

Do stay out of trouble, but ...

Mike Sullivan ([00:36](#)):

Well, let's see if we can figure that out here and maybe get you into a little more trouble. Anyway, Scott, thanks for joining me today. It's funny, but as I was preparing for this episode of the podcast, I often go back to previous notes. I have notes on whatever podcast. I just pop it up so I have a general view as to what I'll be doing. I don't really know which one I'm popping up. So I just picked one at random today as I prepared for this episode. And lo and behold, it was an episode that you and I did way back when we were still Alberta one call. So that should tell you something. We've been utility safety partners for a long time. And I have to say I'm a little bit shocked that this podcast, the safety moment continues. As you know, it was a bit of a COVID experiment and one that's continuing to keeps going.

([01:28](#)):

And I think we're one of very few that does this. But in any event, it was kind of, well, look at that. We're doing this and this is cool, right?

Scott Landes ([01:37](#)):

Yeah. No, you raise a good point. I mean, it's a good testament to the quality of your podcast because you're right. I mean, everybody and their mother popped up a podcast when COVID hit and not very many have survived.

Mike Sullivan ([01:54](#)):

Yeah. And it's been fun. I've been able to talk to a lot of people in different areas and it's been really a lot of fun. But the reason why we're here today, and this is ... You never ceased to amaze me, Scott. You keep reinventing yourself. And so for people who don't know, and if you're listening to this episode or the safety moment for one of the first times when you've never met Scott, you were instrumental in the damage prevention landscape of North America for decades. And so maybe just before we get into what we're talking about today, which is your latest endeavors, maybe just give a brief history of who you are and how you got to do what you

Scott Landes ([02:38](#)):

Did. Yeah. Okay. Well, the cliff notes is I did not get a degree in damage prevention. I stumbled into the industry, like a lot of people. Had a college buddy convinced me to go to work for his dad's company, which made pipeline markers and cable markers. And that was in the early 80s and that connected me to the one calls around North America. And I just got hooked on the whole concept of damage prevention and their mission. And then fortunately I got fired from that job and had to start- So that was your

Mike Sullivan ([03:17](#)):

Friend's parents or your friends? You got fired from your friends? Oh,

Scott Landes ([03:20](#)):

Interesting.

Mike Sullivan ([03:22](#)):

You

Scott Landes ([03:23](#)):

Learn

Mike Sullivan ([03:23](#)):

Something new every day.

Scott Landes ([03:26](#)):

I have a gift.

Mike Sullivan ([03:28](#)):

Apparently you do.

Scott Landes ([03:29](#)):

So then I didn't have really any money or any ideas, but I had to dream something up quick. And fortunately, I have a wonderful wife who was making decent money and very understanding. And so I started Rhino, which ended up manufacturing pipeline and cable route markers and damage prevention systems. And so that kept me extremely aligned with damage prevention because we really sold helping people prevent damage, not selling signs and markers. And so that kept me real involved. And then eventually I started Excavation Safety Alliance, which started as infrastructure resources to have a

conference, which we started in 2003 and eventually the magazine and the excavation safety guide. And so that kept me even obviously more involved in damage prevention and the education behind damage prevention. So that's the decades thing always makes me feel really old when you say things like that, but I guess it's

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

True. Yeah, just look at us.

Scott Landes ([04:43](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Sullivan ([04:44](#)):

Yeah, right?

Scott Landes ([04:44](#)):

Yeah.

Mike Sullivan ([04:45](#)):

We've been around for a while, even though we don't feel like it, but we've been around for a while. And you've seen a lot of things. You've seen a lot of things in the industry come and go. And I've said this before, you've been at the forefront of the damage prevention process and engagement and training for decades. You've been instrumental and the tip of the hat to you and everybody that worked with you. And I say it worked with you because I don't think anybody ever felt they were working for you. That's not who you are. And that brings us to what we're going to talk about today. As I mentioned earlier, you've kind of reinvented yourself and you've written two books and now you're an author. And I'm very much looking forward to reading both of them. I've read a little bit of part of them, part of one of them.

([05:35](#)):

But before we go into the damage prevention book, and that's going to be the focus way I want to talk about today, you wrote another book, and it's really the importance of brand

Scott Landes ([05:49](#)):

And

Mike Sullivan ([05:49](#)):

The culture behind that. And I found it so ... And I've only seen the cover, and I know you've worked on this a little bit, and I know a little bit of how you've worked on this, but the little bit that I do know, I was like, yeah, that's a fit because I've always found you to be the most humble of leaders and everybody I know who's ever worked with you has come away from it being a better person and enjoying the experience. And when I look at this book, and I want you to talk about it a little bit, is that importance of brand. And I think it's such a perfect marriage or explanation of everything that is Scott Landes. So what prompted you to do that?

Scott Landes ([06:35](#)):

Yeah, it's a good question. So the book is called Jimmy Buffett Brand Genius, and it really came out of ... Obviously I'm a Jimmy Buffett music fan, but as I started going to more concerts and watching what he did, it dawned on me that this guy was a business genius and a brand genius. And he made it easy because he really kind of created authentic lifestyle brands as a thing, which simply means, from my view anyways, basically he lived his life and the products and the things spun out of that. He didn't have to make stuff up. It was because he was passionate about what he did, his core beliefs in life, and he just attracted all these people that had the same outlook on life and liked that lifestyle. And then he had the visionary part to then make products and things that those people actually wanted and liked, as opposed to trying to make some products and find somebody to buy them.

[\(07:46\)](#):

So I just got really interested in that whole thing and started doing research probably three and a half years ago now. And probably some of the big takeaways for me were the fact that this wasn't an accident. He had one big hit in 1977, and it was really hardly played on the radio compared to most. And he parlayed that into this multi-billion dollar business. And the thing that I was most amazed by when I really dove in was he had fun all the way along. And that's why people followed him. That's why the businesses worked. He wasn't faking anything. Everybody who knew him tells you he was exactly who he was on stage. He loved people. He loved ideas. It really fun. Had really strong core beliefs on giving back and making people happy and having a positive impact. It wasn't just like a shtick for a concert, right?

[\(08:47\)](#):

Yeah. It was really him. And to me, that really translates, and I covered this a little bit in the book, into our industry about damage prevention, because we do have a number of businesses within the industry that are really what I would call authentic lifestyle brands. And that really means not just a leader like in your case, obviously you're a great leader for USP and passionate and all that, but from my limited experience with your team, it's like everybody I've met is also extremely passionate inside and outside of work. And so once you have that authenticity and if you can translate it out, it really sucks in customers because you're not really trying to attract them. They're coming to you. And as the guy who Jimmy partnered with would say, it's like, it's so much easier when you just be authentic and have the people come to you.

[\(09:52\)](#):

And that's kind of the short version of what I think really helped catapult Jimmy as a brand or Margaritaville as a brand is he was a visionary and an idea guy nonstop like you. And fortunately he ran into this guy socially who was kind of an execution guy who didn't know diddly about Jimmy Buffett except Margaritaville and come Monday. And he went, Jimmy invited him to go to Jazz Fest probably 30 years ago now. And so this guy went to Jazz Fest and was standing on the stage and he's looking out at what he says, 100,000 people and half of them dressed up and crazy fanatical about everything. And he said to Jim, he said, "I think you might have a brand here." And so then Universal Studios came to Jimmy and wanted to do a Margaritaville at Universal Studios and they wanted to license the right to do that.

[\(11:02\)](#):

And that's when Jimmy said, "You know what? I'm going to call up this John Colon is the guy's name and talk to him and see what he thinks." And he told John, he said, "I think we have something here and I'd love to partner up with you, but I can't pay you anywhere near what you're making now, but you can wear flip-flops and shorts to work." And this is 30 years ago, so that was ahead of the curve.

[\(11:27\)](#):

And anyway, they teamed up. And so it seems like a great combination. He was like the execution guy and Jimmy could just keep spinning off ideas and he had somebody to execute them and to say, "Well, I don't think that one's going to

Mike Sullivan ([11:41](#)):

Work." And so an interesting ... And I get it, right? I get why you would be attracted to that because it's so much ... Well, that's you. That's kind of how you've built your relationships and built your business. And going back to what I said earlier, I haven't met anybody who didn't work with you and came away from it better.

Scott Landes ([12:03](#)):

And

Mike Sullivan ([12:04](#)):

They made you better, you made them better and collectively the organization that you created, was it Rhino or Infrastructure Resources, Excavation Safety Alliance. Those are truly wonderful moments in a career. And you could tell. I mean, you could just tell by the people who worked with you and I had the pleasure of connecting with and I'm still connected with. And so now you've never written a book before. Had you ever thought like, "I can write a book someday." I mean, maybe we all think that plant a tree, you build a house, write a book, we're all supposed to do that. Had you ever thought about doing that, really given it serious thought?

Scott Landes ([12:45](#)):

No, I never had. I'm not exactly a literary giant. I mean, I've written tons of articles, but they're all business, kind of short, I would say on the edge of boring business articles. And I just thought-

Mike Sullivan ([13:04](#)):

Riveting stuff though. I know I'm right there with you. This riveting edge of your seat, cliffhangers.

Scott Landes ([13:09](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.

Mike Sullivan ([13:11](#)):

Yeah.

Scott Landes ([13:11](#)):

Yeah. And really paint vivid pictures. Oh

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

Yeah, yeah.

Scott Landes ([13:15](#)):

So I just connected all the dots about Jimmy and this thing. Well, I love marketing and I love his music and the lifestyle and maybe I should do this. So then I started kind of doing the research. And honestly,

that's like the easy part, starting looking at things and listening to podcasts and reading books. And then sadly, it took him passing away and all of a sudden I went, "If I'm actually going to do this instead of talk about it, I probably should start now." And I said, "I think I've told you before, it's like, wow, it's a lot more work than I ever anticipated." And also learning when it's not just business of trying to make sure you're saying the sky is blue and the wind is blowing and not just spewing out facts. So it was a ton of work and really like about a three-year process, but I also really enjoyed it.

[\(14:18\)](#):

And I don't know how you could do that if it wasn't a topic that I really, really liked, but not knowing how to organize a book, how to do all those things. And now I'm learning how do you actually market this thing and sell it because this is a self-published book. So in a perfect world, I'd love to sell enough to make my money back. But the reality is in a bigger picture, if it actually does sell, the net profits are getting donated to the Singing For Change, which is kind of his main charity that he put together, which I really love what they're doing. And so that gives me extra motivation to try and get it out there.

Mike Sullivan [\(15:06\)](#):

So when did that book publish? Because that's started getting into the next book here.

Scott Landes [\(15:11\)](#):

Ah, great question. It actually is publishing on the first day of summer, June 21st. So I-

Mike Sullivan [\(15:19\)](#):

Very

Scott Landes [\(15:19\)](#):

Nice. ... just was looking at the website this morning I think is done and pretty soon I'm going to be able to tell people it exists and they can pre-order.

Mike Sullivan [\(15:29\)](#):

Cool. Well, I'd like to have an autograph copy if you don't mind. And hand delivered would be even better, but-

Scott Landes [\(15:34\)](#):

I have to. It's too exciting. Expensive to ship things to Canada. Oh

Mike Sullivan [\(15:38\)](#):

Yeah, you can't. So you wrote this book, it was kind of a labor of love in a way, right? And right down to the heart and the soul of how you have built your business and your relationships and everything around brand and the culture. And I would say the culture, maybe even more than the brand, that's when I think of Rhino and Excavation Safety Alliance. There was a culture there, probably even more so than a brand. And then not to be outdone because it was a really hard thing to do, you decided to write another book and this one here is what I knew first,

[\(16:20\)](#):

Holding back disaster. And I was really honored to be part of that team you had to review certain sections or review the book in its entirety and make some suggestions or whatever that you might have

needed. But that experience of putting that together, I mean, it's almost like the way I initially thought of it when I heard you were writing this book and then I saw different drafts and stuff was, well, this is a gentleman who's been in the industry a long time and it's almost like a memoir in a way. But then when I started to read it, it says, "No, it's not a memoir. It's really not." It's an account of what the industry has done, why it exists, and really holding up all the people and positions and cultures that support that entire damage prevention process. And so when did you first have an idea that, "You know what?

[\(17:23\)](#):

I need to write a book like this. " And because let's face it, nothing exists like it. It's

Scott Landes [\(17:28\)](#):

The

Mike Sullivan [\(17:28\)](#):

Only one of its kind that I'm aware of.

Scott Landes [\(17:31\)](#):

Well, that's a good question. And if you'd asked me if I was going to write a second book when I wasn't even done with the first one, I would've said, "Are you crazy?" And actually it all started as a result of your 40th USP anniversary event in BAMP because up there I was talking to Benjamin Dirker and

[\(17:55\)](#):

He said, "Have I ever thought about writing a book?" And I said, "Ooh." It's crossed my mind, but I said, "I'm not ready for that much work and et cetera, et cetera." And so then he called me, I don't know, maybe a month or two later and said, "Well, what if you had a co-author?" And I said, "Well, that might work." And as it turns out, it was a perfect connection because Benjamin is, he's early thirties, mid-thirties. I don't know how old he is, but he's young. He's a lawyer. I don't hold that against him. And he runs the AI, so I think tank on infrastructure innovation. So he was newer to the industry several years, but not decades. So it was a great combination because he's coming at it from a completely different lens than I was. And on top of that, he's like a really good writer.

[\(19:00\)](#):

So he had this great idea because we're talking about, so how do you make a book like this sort of interesting so we can actually get people to read it.

[\(19:12\)](#):

So his idea was to write an introduction to the book and then actually to each chapter that is more like a novel. So it starts out with a story about a disaster that's going to happen or happens, how it's blowing up, the typical things we hear about. So he highlights this thing really well, makes it personal. And then at the end it says, "Well, but that actually didn't happen because all these people did their job." And so he found a way for every chapter to have a story that leads into the content of the chapter. And so that's really good stuff because now it makes it practical and useful. And like I said, I don't think I would've had the motivation to do this all by myself and having him, we were able to kind of divide up the chapters a little bit and then go back and read each other's.

[\(20:12\)](#):

And he did all the intros. So it worked out really, really well in terms of just working together. And so anyway, Alberta One Call, excuse me, USP is responsible for this book because it got talked about up there.

Mike Sullivan ([20:29](#)):

Oh, isn't that cool? And I met Benjamin not long before that actually and yeah, very interesting guy, very interesting guy. And he's got that fire in him, that quiet fire, that just always burning and he's going to make something of it. So I'm glad to hear that you both connected and what a good marriage that must have been. And I can only imagine you coming into your office in the morning and opening up your emails like, "Oh, I guess I'm on a bit of a timeline here because Benjamin's pushing for whatever." And I can only imagine that would've happened because my limited engagement working on this with you, and I wouldn't call it working on it, it was like, "Oh yeah, I got to get back to them and provide some feedback." So who did you write the book for? I mean, did you kind of do it for yourself or did you write it for the industry or was there somebody or something you're writing it for or just you just had to get it out?

Scott Landes ([21:32](#)):

Well, that's a good question and kind of really we aimed at multiple people. One is kind of people in the industry, we have lots of great education in the industry, but it usually revolves around just that click before you dig, call before you dig, get that part of it done. So everybody who's in the industry knows that. But if you're a locator, do you really understand how one call centers work, how Sue works, just the history? Probably not. If you're an operator in a contact center, you may know a broader, a swath of information than most, but probably not everything. And so the book is designed to kind of be a, here's an intro book. It doesn't make you an expert on locating or any one topic, but if you go through the book, you really have a good understanding of how the industry is all connected, all the different facets.

([22:31](#)):

So the hope is that then the people who go through it will actually have the respect for the parts of the industry that they're not personally involved in so they can see how it fits together. So that was one big component. And the other one is obviously getting the general public a little bit better understanding of how vital everything underground is. They can't see it, so it's not their fault. They're not thinking about it, right? You can't pick up a phone, you can't do anything without what's underground, making it possible. And so we wanted to write it from that point of view and then it's so it's not so techy that somebody's going to just drop it because it sounds boring. And that's a little bit of what Benjamin's intro stories will do. Is it going to be a best seller to the general public?

([23:28](#)):

Probably not, but we're hoping to get it into schools in particular where they're teaching construction and all those kinds of things. So that was part of it. And also the third major thing was we need young people coming into the industry. And I think in Canada and down here, that's still just a thing we need. And we have the perfect industry for the younger generations because so many of them are really wanting to make a difference. They don't want to just go punch a clock and go in every day. And there's not many industries that you can make more of a difference in than ours. So we have that message out there and we need innovation as we all know. So I think we really have the things as an industry that are there to attract young people. And honestly, not to put in a plug for USP again, but your certification program and the damage prevention certification program, that's kind of a missing component.

([24:38](#)):

If we get people to read this book and they say, "Well, I want to get into this industry," I think your certification program is now going to say, "Well, I can not only get in, but I can see a pathway to being a professional." And I think I've said this before, but to me, that program has the best chance of changing the industry positively long term than honestly anything that I've seen in all these decades.

Mike Sullivan ([25:07](#)):

Well, I'm glad to hear you say that, and I hope so too. And as I've got to thank my board of directors for giving me the latitude

Scott Landes ([25:18](#)):

To

Mike Sullivan ([25:19](#)):

Help develop that, and Coral Lacaniak is working hard to get this moving, and she is doing a great job. And I do think it will change things for the better. If you look at the certified registered safety professional and what that has done once that certification emerged and what that has done for the safety industry, that's what my hope is for the damage prevention certification, is that it does that. Going back to the book, and I've said this before, I think you and I have talked and I have often thought just in general terms, what does our industry need? When I say our industry, the whole damage prevention process, what do we need to really finally breach beyond that invisible wall of awareness that we can't seem to get past? We get there, we've done a tremendous amount of work, that extra 5% that's going to really help promote what it is that we do and why we do it.

([26:24](#)):

And I think back to Ron Howard, the movie Backdraft, and yeah, it sensationalized the firefighting industry and it almost made fire look as though it had its own personality and

([26:38](#)):

Physical being beyond all that. But I do recall when that movie came out, and it was a blockbuster and that movie came out, the result was so many people started getting, "I'm going to be a firefighter. I want to go into that." Sensationalize it, whatever you want to call it about Hollywood factor. But I often thought, what if a guy like Ron Howard came along and said, "Okay, everybody in damage prevention, I want to do a screenplay. I want to do something on this." And I think it would really have done an amazing job at promoting the industry and all the different tentacles that work together in unison, as you mentioned, and as the book articulates, to prevent damage and preserve public worker community safety to save lives. That's really what it does. And I think in some respects, the book does that, right?

([27:38](#)):

I mean, it's taking all of that, as you described, and going through an event and you know what? It didn't happen.

Scott Landes ([27:49](#)):

It

Mike Sullivan ([27:49](#)):

Could have, but it didn't. And on a previous discussion with another gentleman on a podcast, we talked about measuring what didn't happen and- Interesting. ... that's a bit of a mystery, right? Yeah, exactly.

It's very, I find it's very thought provoking. And when I went through your book, and again, I have to really appreciate that you let me do that, I started to think, this is what the book is doing. It's measuring what didn't happen. It's looking at all of the influences and all the positions and roles and processes for everybody listening in the US that contribute to ensure that damage doesn't happen. That's the measure of what didn't happen, right? And it's almost easier to measure what did not happen. I mean, what did happen because if something goes awry, well, I can point right here. This is where the process broke down and there wasn't that initial locate request or whatever happened.

[\(29:00\)](#):

I think in that regard, I think you've achieved something here that the book will help promote the industry and promote it in such a good way. It's not a shock and awe, but it could have been. And I think that's what ... When I read the first paragraph, first chapter, I thought, "Okay, I think I know where he's going here, but I didn't know, and this could go either way, what will happen?" And I'm starting to get attached to this character who's getting up in the morning to go and do locates, and I hope he's going to be okay, that's what I started thinking about. And then not to reveal the big reveal, but that was what I was thinking about. So now you've written a book, it's completed, and I know there's a release date, but I'll let you tell me that. When is the release date?

Scott Landes [\(29:57\)](#):

Yeah, the release date is, we are This is actually a real live publisher signed. Taylor and Francis is going to be publishing it. And so we're shooting for, they're saying like August 9th. So that's the other thing I learned is like, would you start working with these big publishers? Boy, nothing happens fast. But they do a really good job with it. It's actually, if you Google it now, it's kind of all over the internet. You can't actually order it, but I think you can get on a wait list. And so that's the goal is to have it out for down here in the US. Part of the reason for doing it then is a lot of the call centers down here have a big push for public awareness on August 11th for 811. And so they're looking for earned media coverage. And so we're hoping that the book release can tie into that and get some media coverage.

[\(31:00\)](#):

And then there's also the Global Damage Prevention Summit in August in Nashville. And so luckily it should be out and available there. So that's when it's coming out. And to your point, Mike, too, I want to reiterate that it's like this isn't actually a Scott Landes and Benjamin Dirker solo thing. We have tons of people like you who are the individual experts contributing, reviewing. We've got lots of things that came out of the Excavation Safety Alliance, now AX Town Halls on all these topics. So he and I sat down and said, "We're not going to pretend that we know everything." But I think between the two of us, we know pretty much everybody who does know everything. And so- Collectively. Yeah, collectively. Yeah. So we were able to reach out to people like you and others who were gracious enough to take the time to make contributions and review it.

[\(32:05\)](#):

So that's why I think it works. And your idea about the movie, I love the idea. Probably not going to get Ron Howard to jump in and do it, but it doesn't mean- And you

Mike Sullivan [\(32:16\)](#):

Never know, right? He doesn't come up with anything big for a while, so

Scott Landes [\(32:19\)](#):

Maybe

Mike Sullivan ([32:19](#)):

This is it. I'm sure he's listening to this podcast.

Scott Landes ([32:23](#)):

I'm sure.

([32:24](#)):

And so as I think I've told you before, I'm on this nonprofit board of American Trails and have been in pursuit of a docuseries, kind of like a series reality show about building trails because much like damage prevention, people who go out and hike on trails, which I know you like to do, you just hike on this trail and think, "Well, this just appeared. It can't BDPs." Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And I can tell you the building of trails, particularly the remote trails, is crazy hard and takes an amazing amount of work, engineering on the spot, innovation, super fascinating. And so I decided, since I didn't know better to try and pursue having a docuseries made, which I knew even less about that than I did about writing a book. But I found some producers who actually have a show on discovery who are all in.

([33:25](#)):

And so we've made a little sizzle reel. And I think it's going to happen one way or the other, and I'm hoping in the next 12 months we'll have it on the air. And so the reason I mention that is because the idea for us as damage prevention industry, maybe it's not a series, but there may be a way out there to at least create a kind of a compelling documentary, even if it's not a Ron Howard movie that could help because there's so many avenues that stream stuff like this that people actually watch now, which didn't used to be the case.

Mike Sullivan ([34:03](#)):

I mean, people watch baking shows and the edge of your seat, and I don't get it, but it's got a following and something like this, and are there cliff hangers along the way? Of course, everything we do, there's moments in time, "Oh, it could go this way, it could go that way." And people do find that interesting. I love the idea. It's an awesome idea. And why not? Yeah. Why not? Here in Canada, the US, the History Channel, that type thing, they hear all kinds of things. And what an interesting concept. I love the idea. Yeah. If you want somebody to collaborate with, I might know somebody.

([34:45](#)):

There was a gentleman we used to work with years ago, and he was part of a comedy duo here in Alberta, and he's also a producer. And you have, I can't remember the gentleman's name, Mike something or other, and their show is, they travel around finding stuff out of barns and stuff. I can't remember the name of the show. And there was a group in Canada that did the exact same thing, American Pickers and they had Canadian pickers. Well, this guy I know was one of the producers of Canadian pickers and something like that. Would you be interested in doing something like this? You never know. He might say, Mike, out of your mind, forget it. But maybe there's something there. Who knows?

Scott Landes ([35:27](#)):

Yeah. In my next

Mike Sullivan ([35:29](#)):

Career, whenever that is.

Scott Landes ([35:30](#)):

No, we should talk because it is ... I thought people were going to laugh at me too. And first couple people I called, they still liked the idea, but the guys who have been working on it now for a couple years, it has this Trail Dogs, as this series is called, has all the components that they think were perfect for that kind of show. And I really believe our industry does as well. So we might be surprised and we should be able to find funding probably more easily in our industry than in trails. As it turns out, everybody likes to use trails and build trails. They don't like to part with money, but we have at least enough people who have facilities. They have a stake in it. There are a few more people. There's no 10,000 pound gorillas in trails. There's thousands and thousands of people, but no really big people.

([36:25](#)):

And in our industry, it's not that expensive to produce one of these. So I think it's a realistic objective.

Mike Sullivan ([36:35](#)):

So going back to the book, Holding Back Disaster, you worked with Benjamin on this. How long was the writing process? About 18 months, something like that?

Scott Landes ([36:44](#)):

Yeah, that's about right. Yep. We started probably in talking about it in December of 24 ... No, December of 20 ... When was your 40th anniversary?

Mike Sullivan ([36:58](#)):

Two years ago. A little over two

Scott Landes ([37:00](#)):

Years

Mike Sullivan ([37:00](#)):

Ago. Okay.

Scott Landes ([37:00](#)):

So yeah, just after that. So yeah, about a year and a half. Yep.

Mike Sullivan ([37:04](#)):

Yep. And if you were ... This is kind of stepping way ahead. The book will be published in August. It's going to be a bestseller top of the list for months, probably over a year bestseller. But if you were rewriting this book in 10 years from now, what would you hope we've finally solved? That's though provoking because I think about that too. If I'm going to step back and be interviewed 10 years from now, so well, Mike, what do you think? It's hard.

Scott Landes ([37:42](#)):

It is hard. It's interesting because like a lot of industries, this industry is fairly resistant to change and I think it comes from there are so many moving parts that changing any one part affects so many other parts. So it's really hard to get that done. And again, I still think your certification program's going to be a big part of it, but I think the biggest single change is finding a way to get stakeholders at the highest level

to simply work together and communicate and decide this is a public safety thing. I don't think that we really have C-suite kind of people understanding that this is public safety. And you and I can outline a thousand problems that need to be addressed, right? And people are trying, but until we get people up there who can make decisions and lead by example and say, "This is what we're going to do.

(38:51):

" And you get the contractors and the locators and all of the different stakeholders, CEOs from those major companies to sit down in a room and say, "This is what we're willing to do because we want to lead." So I think we talk about collaboration all the time and there is collaboration, but unfortunately, at least what I see is typically collaboration at lower and mid-levels. And until we get it up high, it's really hard because down here, the laws are a big part of the problem, our individual state laws, but to realistically- But made

Mike Sullivan (39:29):

With the best intentions, right?

Scott Landes (39:31):

Exactly.

Mike Sullivan (39:33):

Made of the best intentions.

Scott Landes (39:35):

All of them, like basically all laws, I'm sure in both countries, but the ripple effects, they never can understand until they're out there. And then once a law is in place, it's so hard to get it changed. And the people who it affects positively don't want to see it change, the other people do. So anyway, getting laws actually changed at the grassroots level seems like an almost insurmountable task down here. So that's why I say, "You know what? We don't have to change the laws. This is all common sense." If we actually, nobody wants to hit anything, whether you're the excavator or the facility owner. So if we just get the people in the highest levels to agree and permeate that back to culture, as you point out, make it their culture. It's not a mandate. It's funny how many people I've talked to about this is like, so let's say you're, I don't know, a big gas company or a telephone company, let's say you're Telus, right?

(40:38):

And is it realistic that every single employee at Telus should actually think about cables not getting cut? Well, yeah, that's actually a very doable thing if somebody at the top decides to do that. And if you do that and just all the facility owners around North America, get the people at the top to permeate it through their teams of thousands and thousands of people to actually get them to believe it, that they're responsible for damage prevention. Same thing with the big contractors. I think the problem goes away, it never completely goes away, but I think 99% of the problem goes away if we can start at the very top and start pushing it down and it's a cultural change. Without a cultural change, I don't know how you get it changed. Technology helps, but without a culture pushing that-

Mike Sullivan (41:31):

It does help, but it doesn't solve it. And it just makes it a little bit better for a little while. But at the end of the day, I think human behavior is what really the unfortunate culprit is. You can have the best

methods to initiate the damage prevention process, but it has to be initiated. If you don't do it, well then I don't care what methods you have. If you don't initiate it, guess what? Now you have a situation where it's luck of the draw. You're spinning that wheel and you either hit win or you hit lose, and that's the danger. And that's where I think the crux of it is, the human behavior. And the human behavior is, it can be cultural. For here in Canada and other parts and US as well, we have a lot of new Canadians that are coming to Canada.

[\(42:26\)](#):

They're immigrating here from cultures where the damage prevention process may not even exist. And you come to Alberta where call before you dig now, click before you dig. It's part of our vernacular, our safety vernacular, just because of the sheer amount of buried infrastructure we have in the province.

[\(42:49\)](#):

And similar to, I call ourselves the Texas of Canada in that regard, and yet there's a lot of people moving here that they have no idea, no clue. And I was one of those people. When I moved to Alberta in 1991, I came from Eastern Canada. Yeah, I knew about pipelines, but not to the depth that I probably could or should have when I got here as a young man. That certainly has changed and I've gotten involved in the industry, and that's me coming from somebody in Canada who speaks the language or languages or whatever,

[\(43:25\)](#):

And that was still a disconnect. And so you have somebody from a different part of the world coming to Canada or Alberta. There's nobody coming to your door with a welcome wagon saying, "Here's what you need to know. " Welcome to Canada and here's what you need to know. But it's almost like we ... And that's become a problem. Unfortunately, it's become a problem. It's become a risk and with risks, then you have consequences. So that's a big ... Is that human behavior or is it cultural behavior or cultural influence? I'm not sure which. So it's a big challenge. Now, again, I want to be respectful of your time and thanks for doing this, but what's one action that you think every listener to this podcast or every reader of holding back disaster when it comes out could take tomorrow that would immediately reduce damage, the risk of damage?

Scott Landes [\(44:24\)](#):

Wow, that's a great question.

Mike Sullivan [\(44:29\)](#):

So this is the question that solves everything. After the answer to this, we don't have to do anything else evermore. Scott Landes has solved the problem.

Scott Landes [\(44:39\)](#):

Yeah. I guess call the local CEO of your utility nearby and try and convince them that they need to think about public safety. No, being more realistic, I do think it's really getting people one-on-one to change their mindset, and maybe it's talking to their peers. Usually there's always a backstory. So when somebody ... I have a good example of we had a sewer line in our newer house that was cracked from a tree root. It wasn't leaking, it wasn't emergency. So we waited till spring and got to pay somebody to come out and dig a four or five foot deep hole in the front yard. And of course, he comes out there and it's just like a guy. I mean, it's a very small company, maybe a couple people, and there's no painter flags. And I said, "Well, did you call for a locate?" And he said, "No." He said, "If there's anything out here, I just call them and they come right out.

[\(45:44\)](#):

" And I said, "Well, no, that's not how it works." He says, "Oh yeah, no, I do because it's an emergency because it's a sewer leak." And so he's able to ... And he was being sincere. He wasn't like a guy trying to abuse the system. He just did this once and it worked. So why would I call two days in advance in Minnesota?

Mike Sullivan [\(46:06\)](#):

The planned emergencies.

Scott Landes [\(46:08\)](#):

And so I think I got the message through to him and I gave him an excavation safety guide and everything else and he got it. There was no reason for him not to call when it wasn't an emergency. And I'm sure he does deal with some that are. So it's a slow process, but I would say it's a one-on-one process getting people to understand there's always a backstory. Just don't assume that they're doing it because they want to abuse the system. There may be a reason, usually it's lack of training and knowledge.

Mike Sullivan [\(46:42\)](#):

Yeah. So hopefully, if somebody reads this book and they get a little bit more knowledge and they'll understand the repercussions of not doing the right thing. Sometimes the legislation that has a place, but at the end of the day, it comes down to the person, right?

Scott Landes [\(47:00\)](#):

It does. That

Mike Sullivan [\(47:00\)](#):

Human behavior and doing the right thing. Scott, it's always a pleasure to sit down and chat with you. Our careers have intermingled many times throughout the decades and I've always had a lot of fun working with you and alongside you and watching you work. And watching you work was never like work. You were definitely embodying that have fun atmosphere, despite some of the times which were very challenging. And I think the most stressed I ever saw you was at the conferences when I would see you walking the floor and I knew you were on a mission and say, "Okay, I'm not going to bother him right now." Usually I had something extremely important to tell you, I'm sure. Let me interrupt him here with this anecdote of nothingness. But no, it's always been a lot of fun and thanks for doing this with me. I wish you all the best with both books and I'm really looking forward to both of them coming out, but for sure holding back disaster.

[\(48:06\)](#):

And I'm going to ask you now, in March 2027, Utility Safety Partners is holding its safety conference in Calgary. And I'm going to invite you now, and you can't say no because you're on air. Invite you now to be there to plug the book and to talk about the experience.

Scott Landes [\(48:25\)](#):

Yeah. There's no way I'll miss it if I can't. It sounds like fun. Well,

This transcript was exported on May 04, 2026 - view latest version [here](#).

Mike Sullivan ([48:31](#)):

And there's nothing better than Calgary in March. It could be 30 degrees or minus 30.

Scott Landes ([48:38](#)):

It's

Mike Sullivan ([48:38](#)):

A flip of the dice.

Scott Landes ([48:39](#)):

Yeah, but BAMF is right down the road.

Mike Sullivan ([48:43](#)):

Yeah, it's not far. It's not far. Scott, thanks for doing this and best of luck with everything.

Scott Landes ([48:48](#)):

Yeah, thanks for having me. Appreciate it.

Mike Sullivan ([48:50](#)):

That's going to wrap things up on the podcast. I want to thank our producers, stories and strategies, and I hope you choose to follow this podcast on any director you're listening on. And please do leave a rating. We appreciate it. You can follow us on X @utilitysafety, on Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, we're everywhere. And if you'd like to send us a note, maybe you have an episode idea, you can email us at info@utilitysafety.ca. Just put podcast in the subject header, now get to us. I'm Mike Sullivan. I'm 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.