

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](#)):

Hi there and welcome to the Safety Moment Podcast. My guest today is Mr. James Cross. I probably doesn't need any introduction, but James was one of the co-hosts of the Jim and James or Coffee with Jim and James podcast. I've been wanting to chat with him for a long time, just about how they got into it, the whole origins of the podcast and their experience. They've had some great experiences that I was really looking forward to sharing with him and with everybody. So let's get right into it. James, thanks so much for joining me on The Safety Moment. Your podcasts are not out of your realm of understanding, so this is quite easy in terms of technology.

James Cross ([00:58](#)):

Yeah, we laughed about it in the pre-show, right? Just talking about, "Hey, by the way, I use all this. I have all the equipment. Let me just get to my studio." It's not always this easy, right? Sometimes the hardest part is to make sure everybody sounds okay and has good internet and our home to be able to pull these off. So I'm glad we were able to align.

Mike Sullivan ([01:21](#)):

No, I really appreciate it. We were talking earlier, as you mentioned, the pre-show and the whole idea of a podcast. Can you imagine me a decade ago, even less than that? What? Sorry, you're going to do what? On radio. On safety? Yeah. Is it radio you mean? Yeah, exactly. And yet here we are. We were talking earlier and I think this may be episode 100 or 101, maybe even 102 or 98. I'm not sure, but we've been doing this for a while and I don't know where the time has gone. So if you are the millennium number 100, or sorry, not millennium. Centium, I guess. I'll

James Cross ([02:00](#)):

Take

Mike Sullivan ([02:01](#)):

It. Yeah, you'll take it. Why not? Anyway, thanks for joining me. This is fun. Absolutely.

James Cross ([02:05](#)):

Thanks for having me. You've been

Mike Sullivan ([02:06](#)):

Doing this for a while too. So before we get into what began or how your podcast began, tell me a little bit about you. Who is James Cross and how did you get into this business?

James Cross ([02:19](#)):

You bet. Man, great question. And thanks, Mike, for letting me jump on. Been excited. It's always fun to be on the other side of the mic sometimes, right?

Mike Sullivan ([02:30](#)):

Yeah,

James Cross ([02:30](#)):

I agree.

([02:31](#)):

So first and foremost, I'm a husband and a father. I'm blessed to go out into our industry and I say our industry, whether it's the pipeline side or whether it's damage prevention, we're all connected. And I speak a lot, but I always kind of start off the fact that I'm a husband and a father first and foremost, but I do spend my time out in the industry representing Energy WorldNet or EWN. I get to go out quite a bit and represent and be on stage. And my job is chief experience officer at EWN and people always say, "What's that mean?" And I think we're still trying to figure that out. But I can tell you one thing, I got paid last week and it's definitely not CEO. I can tell you that. But no, my job is really to go out into the industry and make sure the experience that folks have with us as a company, whether you're a client, a future client, a vendor, an association, a regulator, a competitor, that it's the same, right?

([03:41](#)):

It's consistent from our core values as well. So we try to be who we say we are and my job is to kind of confirm that we're being that no matter in what setting.

Mike Sullivan ([03:55](#)):

Well, that's really your employer putting a lot of value and trust in you, but also trust and value

James Cross ([04:02](#)):

In- It's terrifying.

Mike Sullivan ([04:03](#)):

... in that role.

([04:04](#)):

Well, I think you're up for the challenge. That's my guess. And I'm sure that their choice for you doing that is pretty darn solid because it takes the right kind of person. I mean, how do you even find the person to fit that role as a very unique role to begin with. But the organization who says, "You know what? We need somebody to do this for us." That's a very unique employer. And the culture there has got to be very, very strong and not just words on a page. I admire that. I really do. I really do. Well,

James Cross ([04:38](#)):

I'm blessed to be able to do it. You ask how do I end up in this industry? I think all of us at some point kind of laugh about that question, right? We go back into our origin story, but I grew up in West Texas in the Permian. So I was close to oil and gas. My family worked in. It's upstream. It's exploration more so in that world, but I was familiar with it, but honestly on the more kind of chaotic up and down side of exploration. And so honestly, my family was like, "Go do something else. Don't get trapped here into the oil and gas circus that is the Permian and anybody who's been out there understands it, what I'm saying." So I kind of went the tech route. I was nerd at heart and got involved in tech and kind of used it as a ticket out of the Permian, which moved way far away into Dallas-Fort Worth, just up the road in Texas five hours away, but moved a company there.

[\(05:48\)](#):

And then funny enough, about 10 years ago, 10 years ago here in a handful of days, I got an opportunity to work at EWN. I built a house on the urban sprawl line of the metroplex out here. And after doing so, I was just reading our little newspaper classifieds and saw an ad for EWN in it. I was like, "What's this tech company in my little town?" And so anyway, looked into it and the joke was I applied for a job I didn't want and they gave me a job they didn't have. And so anyway, funny enough, I began working there about 10 years ago and my first question at the interview was, so is this like up and down? I'm from the Permian. I try to stay as far as they were like, "No, man, this is consistent. Natural gas is there. It's always there." Our business is pretty stable.

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

So the rest is history, spent 10 years really in the industry now, which is a wild thing to say out loud, but the pod, I like to say it was a fast forward button, but now when I think back of six years, I guess it wasn't really a fast forward button, but it did allow me to expand my network and really become an advocate for natural gas and the greater good of safety in the process.

Mike Sullivan [\(07:17\)](#):

And there's not many, and I'll say of us speaking in this medium about the industry and your podcast, Coffee with Jim and James was one of the, I think maybe the only one that was really central to the energy industry. I talk energy about natural gas, oil and gas. No doubt, no doubt. And for myself, the safety moment, it's a little bit broader. It's damage prevention, it's safety, anything. Right. And maybe a little easier in that regard, but you guys really carved out a niche in a short amount of time. We were talking earlier, I mean, I think a lot of that for myself anyway, my experience was something had to happen because of COVID. We couldn't get out. We were so limited in how we're going to interact and I was approached with the idea of a podcast and okay, well, why not? And here we are years later, COVID is in the rear view mirror, thankfully, and we were still doing it.

[\(08:21\)](#):

And was that how it came about for you or is it just something that I'm interested? What do you think?

James Cross [\(08:28\)](#):

Yeah, I think timing wise, right, you go back. We started it two weeks after the pandemic really started. The lockdown started and I just told this story so it's kind of fresh in my mind, but someone asked me while we were at AGA last week, American Gas Association and they were like, "How'd this come to fruition?" And I said, originally it was like a support group for Jim, my co-host, he traveled a ton for our company. He may go to 40, 50 shows a year. And so for him being stuck at home, he was going stir crazy and we would literally have coffee with Jim and James on a Zoom call. We were just drinking coffee in the mornings talking through things and how are we going to do business in this world without conferences and shows? And it was pivoting and what was that going to look like?

[\(09:25\)](#):

I think that was the word of the year that year. And so one day it was just kind of one of those shower thoughts where I thought, Jim can't be the only one feeling like this. That's right. And listening to him and him just getting to vent and talk about it was so fruitful for him, so therapeutic in the moment. And so I just went to him and the only parameters we had on the first show, and believe me at that point, we didn't even know what show meant. It wasn't a podcast when it started, it was a Zoom call, but our only parameters was to upload into LinkedIn. It couldn't be longer than 10 minutes. And so that was the only rule we had on the first one and I think it was 9:57. I mean, we pushed the limits, but we got on and

recorded it and just really just spoke about the situation we were in and the reality of it all and the challenges in it and the opportunities.

(10:27):

And so we put it out and I think the response initially kind of set the tone moving forward was, "Man, I really needed that. " You nailed it. It was like you were speaking to me and it was our friends and it was our colleagues from the industry reaching out and it was like ... So that next week was probably the hardest one was convincing someone to come on and have coffee with us. As weird as that sounds like we just weren't a virtual world back then like we are now. Getting on a Teams call, I've been on four of them today, right? It's no thing. Yeah, exactly.

Mike Sullivan (11:08):

But

James Cross (11:08):

We do

Mike Sullivan (11:08):

Business, right?

James Cross (11:10):

Somebody said, "Oh, we'll just get on a call and what you're going to record." I'm like, "No, we're going to get on Zoom and I'll send you a link and you got a camera." So convincing that first person to join us was probably the toughest one and then the second one. And so week to week, the first year of episodes we convinced someone that week to come join us and we did that. So we never quit and it was like, who will be on the next one? I don't know. I'm going to call up some guys and we never got ahead. Every week that was the challenge and we did it and we did it. And the rest, I don't want to say the rest is history because there were a lot of moments in there that we changed. I would say episode 51, we felt like we had something and so we felt like we needed to brand it.

(12:07):

We needed to make it consistent, make what eventually would become the logo, but puts a rapper around it and do it justice. We never wanted to get super post-production heavy. It just wasn't what we wanted to create. We think the moments in between are kind of the funny parts that make it our unique brand. Real. Yeah, that makes

Mike Sullivan (12:29):

It real. Yeah.

James Cross (12:30):

Yeah. Yeah. And so later that would make even more sense, but that was a moment when I feel like we super committed to our product and said, "People are watching. Let's see what this is all about. " There was a moment when we realized we had a podcast, which sounds wild way into it. We were just making videos each week to go out in socials and it was like, wait, we made a podcast. Let's start bundling this thing and putting it out that way and promoting the podcast, which sounds wild to think about now, but that was an aha. And then there was one other in there that was really a big moment I'd say the biggest

is when we took the show live out into a conference, I remember we were in Orlando in 21 into 21, somewhere in there we had a booth and we went out for the first time since the pandemic had started.

(13:35):

It was the first show back out and we took the show live there and 34 people sat down with us while we were there and it was chaotic and you could imagine it was so loud and trying to get the mics to work and I'm sure the quality was absolutely terrible. We were yelling to try to get across, but people continued to sit down, people that honestly that wouldn't answer my emails if I was to email them

(14:01):

And we were blown away and that we realized there was so much value and the amount of people we could talk to in those moments, taking it on the road was big, big, big, big, big, big.

Mike Sullivan (14:14):

Oh yeah, I know.

James Cross (14:16):

And that became kind of the show.

Mike Sullivan (14:18):

Well, I know our producer has asked me a number of times, dug downs and stories and strategies that, "Mike, you should do a live broadcast." And I say, "I'm not sure I'm sure I could, but just the ability to do that at an event because you're being pulled in so many different directions to be able to sit down and just have people come in. And I think I've been reluctant because the unknown, but when you guys came to our event at the 40th right in Beth, you had your booth there and at one point you say, Mike, come on, sit down." And I sat down and we just started chatting and I'm thinking, "I think we're recording right now." I didn't mention that, but I just the impression-

James Cross (15:05):

Cold open. Yeah.

Mike Sullivan (15:07):

Yeah, exactly. And it was so relaxed. I thought, yeah, I guess I could do this. I haven't yet, and maybe I never will, but it was just that experience you and Jim were so easy to sit down and talk to and I think that's probably a lot of why you had 34 people that first time and why it's just been so successful is you have that ability. People just want to engage with you, this natural ability, right? Not everybody has that. Are you from a big family? James, I'm curious.

James Cross (15:41):

No, not really. We were a very open family. I feel like we had a lot of conversations and dialogue, maybe other families didn't. I get where you're driving with. I'll tell you where for me, I kind of tied this together later is in high school, somebody told me, "Hey man, you got to get into this one lady's class, Ms. Moose was her name, is her name." And they were like, "You got to get in her class, man." It's one of those classes where she'll give you ... She'd probably hate I'm telling this story, but she'll give you a hall pass, you can just run around the school half the day. And she teaches a whole bunch of different stuff like

public speaking, debate, radio and television back then and things like that. And they're just blow off classes, man. You'll pass and you get to run around town all day.

(16:44):

And I was like, "Sign me

Mike Sullivan (16:46):

Up."

James Cross (16:46):

Oh, amen. Say less, right? So I get in this lady's class and she was an amazing teacher

(16:53):

And I kind of nerded out on it. I really enjoyed public speaking and writing and I studied people that were great speakers and really kind of nerded out on that. And then you got to the radio and television years that I was involved in. This was editing on a board with tape decks. I mean, I was splicing stuff together and really enjoyed it, did a lot of work for the school during that time, like making the TV spots that would go on on the weekend on the public access channel kind of thing in our town. And so really enjoyed that. Debate was great. I really learned so much on how to negotiate and really drive to success. Can you take all that blow off classes that I took? I bet that my final year in my senior year, I was probably in four of her classes and I wasn't running around the halls.

(18:03):

I was really an active participant and I realize now it's funny, they didn't have podcast classes back then. We didn't know what that was. Somebody said, "You always want to be a podcaster?" And I was like, "I didn't know what a podcast was 10 years ago. I don't think half of the world did." So I attribute a lot of it to those classes and genuinely enjoying and being curious about people. I enjoy learning from everybody that I meet and that's been the funnest part, honestly.

(18:35):

That's

Mike Sullivan (18:36):

The same for me. I mean, at the end of the day, I like people I find people interesting. I find their stories interesting. I like meeting people and yet people think, "Oh, Mike, you're an extrovert." I'm not really. I'm not either. If I'm out and about with it in a crowd and I'm engaging with people, at some point it's okay, I've had enough. I got to retreat and that's not uncommon. I hear that more and more and I've always been that way, just never really realized. It's taken me 60 years to figure that out. But yeah, I like people and I find them interesting and I find what makes them tick is interesting. Their history, their origins, as you mentioned,

James Cross (19:23):

Right? I love the origin story. I think that's really what I enjoy the most with the podcast is it's an opportunity for me to go, "What was your first job in the industry?"

(19:32):

And they're, "Oh man, I remember my first day and they go into it. " I learned very quickly that was the funnest part of my job was hearing origin stories. And the fact that people would share, Mike, I'm sure

you're like me, there's a lot of people I've sat down with that have no business sitting down with me at the end of the day, who am I to be sitting with this person and hearing these really intimate details about their lives and how it's impacted and shaped it. But man, how blessed are we that that's our job? I mean, our side car job.

Mike Sullivan ([20:14](#)):

Yeah, exactly. We get to the opportunity to do that. What's one of the most interesting, or I guess when you were sitting down talking with somebody and they were sharing something with you, you thought, "Whoa, I never expected to hear that or to learn this. " Or does anything jump out in your mind like, "That was an interesting episode or that was an interesting interaction."

James Cross ([20:37](#)):

There's so many. There's got to be. It's hard to pick. It's like favorite kid, right? But so whoever's closest to me, that's probably what I'd answer.

([20:48](#)):

But I will say for me, I'll group them more so I think there's kind of ones that I gravitate more to. The folks that have been around 40, 50 years in the industry that are coming on a pretentious podcast of mine, like who am I to ... Again, I've been in there 10. They've been doing real work in the ditch in the trench and here I am talking about it, but they respect me enough because they know it's advocating for an industry that deserves it or for the trades or whatever. And the fact that they will sit down 50 years in and entertain a guy like me, those are some of my favorite stories. I also, the very last full year we did the show, we went out into the field and that was always kind of our goal. I always said it was kind of like the no reservations Anthony Bourdain version of our industry is what was in my head.

([21:49](#)):

When could I actually have coffee on a tailgate looking over a job site that we are about to work through and talk about? That was always the vision. And so that happened the last year. We really got to talk to, I hate to say real folks because the people that get a show, there's a real folks too, but nobody just wants to talk about our industry from a bunch of suits. I mean, it's just the truth. Oh, you want to hear the frontline guys- I got plenty and plenty, but I always wanted to talk to the guy with the shovel in his hand.

Mike Sullivan ([22:24](#)):

And

James Cross ([22:24](#)):

Guys who hugged the

Mike Sullivan ([22:25](#)):

Pipe.

James Cross ([22:26](#)):

Yeah, right. I want to be on a right of way or in the middle of Detroit where we're talking about the real work and we got there and some of those stories were incredible because I was used to the 30, 40 year guys that were telling these stories from way back. Their origin story was 18 months ago. Their origin

story was I'm two weeks on the job and painting this perspective of what their future looked like. And two weeks ago that was not their reality. That probably was the most impactful for me was finally getting out there and look, we got to go to BAMF, right? We got to go to Hawaii. Two weeks before we were in BAMF, we were in Hawaii, talking with Hawaii gas about how they run a utility on a volcanic island, things like that, those times aren't lost on me, but at the end of the day, it was always that no reservation style that I was shooting for was to be by the trench and talking to the folks doing the real work.

Mike Sullivan ([23:37](#)):

I loved having you guys in BAMF and that was a big event for us. I mean, I don't think we realize how big, that's a 40th anniversary. Okay, that's fun. But I still get people saying, "Oh, Mike, that was the best conference I ever been to." And I don't know why. I think it was just the feeling around it, the atmosphere around it. Anything at the BAMF National, the Banff Springs Hotel is always going to be iconic just because you're there. And living literally down the highway from it, I don't really think about it that much and yet people from all over the world, that will be a destination. I'm going to go there someday and my wife and I can drive there for lunch if we want to. And I never really think about it, but it was certainly a high watermark for us and we're so glad that we had you there and Jim there and so many of our friends and colleagues and associates from around the globe, that was a fun event.

James Cross ([24:37](#)):

There really was. And to

Mike Sullivan ([24:38](#)):

Capture it like that and capture it the moment, you're sitting there, you have people coming by and you're looking out of this winter wonderland, it's like Christmas town and to capture the moment I envied you guys because I was obviously pulled in nine different directions. Yeah. Yeah. But I envy you guys because I wanted to capture that too. How do I do that, right? And I'm glad you're able to do that. Looking at the industry and

([25:10](#)):

The podcast or podcasts in general, it's really an evolving medium and the joke is everybody has a podcast and it's true anybody could. There are so many subjects and stories out there to capture and to talk about and to people are interested in. But when I look at the industry and perhaps a little bit more from the perspective of the safety moment and utility safety partners, our job, the core of our job is the locate request process and notification and the nexus of the damage prevention process. And I look back on my three decades plus of working in the industry and I'm trying to figure out, have we really made a difference? We have all these different ways of doing things. Are we really safer?

([26:10](#)):

Are we making a difference? And then I look at the dirt report, whether it's a Canadian one or the one in the US and I just think I can't help but think, and I almost don't want to say it out loud, but it looks like we just kind of changed the date on these reports because it's the same root cause analysis, pretty much the same percentage of damages that are caused by X, Y, Z. And I wonder, well, how come we're not having this impact? We have a zillion ways of reaching the public and really asking them to do one thing to initiate that damage prevention process. And once they do, the likelihood of damage is almost eliminated and yet we're still seeing these things happen. Has that ever crossed your mind? Why are we not ... It comes down to culture, I think, safety

James Cross ([27:07](#)):

Culture,

Mike Sullivan ([27:08](#)):

Which we talked about earlier, but do you share that experience with me or that thought with me?

James Cross ([27:15](#)):

I'm a nerd. So I always go back to the data and what are we measuring-

Mike Sullivan ([27:20](#)):

Data is game.

James Cross ([27:22](#)):

Yeah. And so when we put some goals out there, I know some various areas of the industry of what we intend to cut and whatnot, it was always, for me going back and it will just take damages, right? Since we're talking about it, going back and going, but are we factoring? Number one, like reducing damages, you got to qualify that down so far to what, okay, what does that mean? Secondly, we're in a time right now, obviously fiber and we're not going to pick on fiber. It's not what this is about, but I'm just using it as an example. The amount of fiber going on the ground into the ground is astronomical. Is that factored into damages coming down? Are we measuring the right things? Now, I'm sure you're dealing with the same thing with data centers and whatnot for natural gas, that's something that we don't even have data on to know what those impacts are going to look like.

([28:30](#)):

And so to say we're going to drop numbers or do X, Y, and Z, I need that qualified down. It's hard for me to go, yeah, with confidence that we can do something like that if we're entering territory that we've never seen because of the amount that's going into the ground or disruption as a whole. So it's tough vibe and are we making an impact on it with a podcast? Are we making ... It's hard to attribute really any of the success. I see us all as such a big group organized to do this. I think our culture as an industry, we have to look at that too, because we've pointed fingers for a long time at each other and I see a lot of signs that that's not the climate that we're in now necessarily, but our culture, our safety culture as an industry as a whole working together, I think we've got to look at that and treat it very similar to how we do within organizations because if we're not a joint force in moving this needle, it ain't going to move at the end of the day.

([29:46](#)):

If you got one person that's pointing at the other and the other's doing the same, it's not moving when it all comes down to it.

Mike Sullivan ([29:55](#)):

I tend to see it the same way. I've been watching And part of the industry for many, many years as a regulator, working with a regulator, working with a pipeline industry directly, working as a consultant and working in this capacity as well. And everybody wants to achieve the same goal and yet the cohesiveness to do so, I just feel like we're all dancing around the edges of whatever that might be. Everybody seems to be so focused on how do we attract interest? We're going to have this monster truck or something or whatever. We

James Cross ([30:44](#)):

Throw great parties, Mike. Oh,

Mike Sullivan ([30:46](#)):

We do.

James Cross ([30:47](#)):

Some

Mike Sullivan ([30:47](#)):

Of

James Cross ([30:47](#)):

The

Mike Sullivan ([30:48](#)):

Best.

[\(30:49\)](#):

Yeah. But really what are we accomplishing? And that's I think where I'm getting stuck is what are we accomplishing? And I'm at a point in my career where I'm starting to pull back a little bit and trying to figure out what is it where we need to spend our capital? Where do we need to focus on to make a difference? And obviously the data, the data, the data, as you mentioned, the data is king. And we've had a couple of successes here that are recent premature to, oh, this is good. How many eggs we want to put in that basket? But we think we've found a good avenue, for example, the alternate locate provider. The data is suggesting that's a really strong avenue to go, but we're still doing things in such a grand scale that haven't moved that needle. At some point I would like to see those big organizations really have that moment where, you know what?

[\(32:04\)](#):

We need to really look at what we're doing here and-

James Cross ([32:08](#)):

Stop and think. Because if it's not

Mike Sullivan ([32:09](#)):

Changing it,

James Cross ([32:11](#)):

Then

Mike Sullivan ([32:12](#)):

Maybe that big party is not what needs to happen.

James Cross ([32:15](#)):

Yeah.

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

Those are

James Cross ([32:16](#)):

Hard conversations

Mike Sullivan ([32:17](#)):

Because we love getting together, right?

James Cross ([32:19](#)):

No, no, I think we can do it all.

[\(32:23\)](#):

I think I was just on a panel recently and go back to data a little bit. I think for a lot of us, and again, we can qualify it down to damages or we can take it as a larger safety discussion. Sometimes we see no incidents, no accidents as the ultimate indicator. And that's what we focus on. But I would argue a safety culture that's succeeding. The near misses reports are high. How many do we have in that category compared to incidents and accidents? Yeah, I want a zero on incidents and accidents, but I want to astronomically high, near miscount too, right? Where we're reporting that thing we feel safe, there's no repercussion of it. That's an indicator for me that we're moving in the right

Mike Sullivan ([33:15](#)):

Direction. 100%. 100%. When there's buy-in to the system, for example,

[\(33:20\)](#):

I've been saying this for years. When the Canadian Common Ground Alliance Dirt Report comes out, Alberta consistently looks like, "Whoa, you guys are really bad actors. You have a lot of damages." Well, that's because we have a lot of submitters of reports and that to me is a very good indicator. That means there's buy-in to the system. They realize that if I report these damages and we really determine the root cause analysis and we develop a best practice, a better practice to ensure those incidents never happen again and then we promote whatever that new best practice is, that cycle is going to work. And then I'll see another province, for example, well, they don't have as many damages. Well, how many submitters did they have? Did they have 10? Did they have a hundred? Did they have two? There needs to be some kind of metric that says when you have this many submitters, you're going to have a lot of damages and that's okay.

[\(34:27\)](#):

If you have one submitter and you have a lot of damages, that's a problem. That's a problem. So the dirt report and just reporting in general, when it's voluntary, which is a lot of what we have, we're kind of stuck with the results, but it's all we've got. It's all we've got. And it's a tough conversation because we rely so much on the data, but the data isn't reliable.

James Cross ([34:57](#)):

Garbage in, garbage out, right? Well,

Mike Sullivan ([34:59](#)):

Yeah, we do get stuck that way. Going back to the podcast and you ran it for the better part of six years and at some point not that long ago, you decided to look at some sunset. What brought it to that conclusion?

James Cross ([35:20](#)):

Yeah. I have a job. I do too, exactly. One person asked us on the road one time, they're like, "So when y'all get done here, do y'all just go back to your studio? And is that where you're normally at recording?" And I was like, "That's my second bedroom." I mean, there's also my office and my house, right? But I don't think people realize that I have a job. I run three departments. I'm the head of marketing and our key accounts and industry relations. At the end of the day, it was going back and doing my job and the pod was just a sidecar that I drug along with me. There was a point where it kind of consumed me in a good way. It was what we needed to do and it was important and I would never change it, but 2024 was one of the hardest travel years and just holding the podcast on our shoulders, that was the year we came out, I believe maybe ... Yeah.

([36:28](#)):

Yeah, that's right. 24.

Mike Sullivan ([36:30](#)):

Yep, two

James Cross ([36:31](#)):

Years. We took the show to 25 conferences that year and we had an interview for every single day of the year when we got done if we wanted to put it out that way. And the reason I say that is not for vanity numbers, I say it because behind the scenes, you know how long we got a producer on right now with this, right? Yes. There's a team that makes this stuff happen. It was not my only job during that. And so to go back and lead teams and continue to do that, it was a capacity issue more than anything. We had talked about ramping it down and providing it when the timing was right and we had began that process in 2025. And then in the summer of 25, Jim went to work for GridHawk Holdings, LineQuest. You may know LineQuest. They offered him a job there and it was a great opportunity for him.

([37:37](#)):

He came to me and was like, "Man, we talked about sunsetting this thing. What if in the future y'all show at the end of the day, it's got EWL and the logo, but we could pull it out when the time's right, show that this is bigger. It's about our industry." And I was like, "Man, go take that opportunity," obviously. It wasn't asking for permission, but we found the right time. Luckily we had an event, our last event that last, and then I'll tell you we just did one two weeks ago, but our last event officially was the Texas Gas Association, which actually is where Jim and I met eight, nine years ago when we didn't work together when we were in different areas of the industry and we met there and so it was kind of fitting to come back and do the final episode there.

([38:34](#)):

So we've had strong support. We had so many interviews backed up that it actually, the show ran till the end of last year and some people never even knew. But yeah, just last week we were able to do a reunion in Tampa with the American Gas Association and bring the show back and it had such a warm reception. I can't imagine us not doing it here and there moving forward and it's a good mix. It allows us

to bring something back that meant a whole lot to a lot of folks. And I think we realized that this last week, but also do the important work that our industry needs. At the end of the day, I work for a company that's focused on training, focused on compliance. We're keeping people safe and qualified out in the world. Gem is out there working for obviously a group focused on damage prevention and that's the work at the end of the day we need to provide for this industry.

Mike Sullivan ([39:37](#)):

Well, it's been an interesting run for sure. And I love the idea that it can just come back at any time.

James Cross ([39:44](#)):

There's

Mike Sullivan ([39:44](#)):

A bit of nostalgia to that. There's a

James Cross ([39:47](#)):

Camaraderie- Bring the band back together, right? Yeah,

Mike Sullivan ([39:49](#)):

Exactly. It's like the Kiss Reunion. How many more are we going to ... I mean, they're not done yet. Let's be

James Cross ([39:53](#)):

Honest, right? Sam's the face paint and the long tongue, but yeah, I agree.

Mike Sullivan ([39:56](#)):

They're going to come back. They're going to come back. No, I love that. And the ability to do that is great. This is one of the reasons why I can only do so many episodes a year. I

James Cross ([40:06](#)):

Do.

Mike Sullivan ([40:06](#)):

During the digging season, because we have that up here, we try to do two a month and then we stop when the digging season is over. And just recently we've had some challenges trying to schedule guests and we had a couple that weren't able to join us. We ran some previous episodes and the ability to do that is kind of nice. Okay, good. It takes the pressure off because it is hard. Yes, I do have a job and pretty demanding one and I do have expectations of me and somewhere along the way this became one of those expectations.

James Cross ([40:43](#)):

No doubt.

Mike Sullivan ([40:43](#)):

And I've often wondered, well, how do I stop or should we stop? And if I do, will anybody notice all that, right? They won't. They won't. And then every now and then I'll get an email, somebody, "Hey, Mike, I love what you're doing. I'd love to be on the pod with you guys." And it's like, "Okay. I never knew that was coming. It's kind of neat to have that. " So there is a niche. There is a niche

James Cross ([41:09](#)):

For it. There's

Mike Sullivan ([41:10](#)):

A place for it. And not having coffee with Jim and James out there all the time anymore, people are going to miss it because we do get attached. It's just human nature, right? We do get attached. We love the conversations. We love hearing about people. And what I love about this, for example, you and me here today is there's no boundaries, there's no borders. It's just two guys who are in this

James Cross ([41:41](#)):

Industry. Reliability, Mike. I don't know why they gave me a microphone. They should have known better.

Mike Sullivan ([41:47](#)):

Hopefully they know something you don't, but that's the part I think I love the most is we're far more alike than we are different. No

James Cross ([41:56](#)):

Doubt. I

Mike Sullivan ([41:56](#)):

Don't care where you're from, whether it's Canada, US, the UK, Australia, Singapore, doesn't matter. We're all facing the same kind of struggles and challenges and when we have a success, it's nice to be able to share it. And I think Coffee with Jim and James was really successful for so long and I really applaud you guys for the work that you did. And at a time, let's face it, when we all needed it and we really did and how it began with the two of you just having coffee to help each other out and get through this weird time in our lives and how it evolves so quickly, that's really cool. I'm so glad you shared that with me and everybody else today. And like everything has a beginning, a middle and an end. And I don't think it's the end yet, but maybe the heavy lifting is done, I guess.

James Cross ([42:55](#)):

Yeah. Well, we were blessed, blessed to be able to serve. We say it all the time and continue to serve, like we said, coming back for the reunion, I think it kind of lit that fire again, but we couldn't have done it without support. I mean, at the end of the day, our company believing two guys getting on and recording a Zoom call made any sense whatsoever, right? It sounds so wild. And I have truth, like several years of it, not everybody got it, not everybody understood it, but over time, I think everybody kind of got there and understood that we were talking about something bigger, but support like this, right? We support each other on pods and having you on going out to your show, you said before when we started, there really wasn't a lot of folks doing this. I want to just say Russell Treat, the Pipeliners Podcast is one that we were on super early on before our show.

[\(44:01\)](#):

I mean, it sparked the idea of without ... I mean, eventually we became a podcast, but I can't say that some of that wasn't attributed to being on his. And he's still out there doing it. I just saw him last week. We supported each other along the way. The majority of podcasts, I don't know what the stat is, but three. They don't make it past episode three. The fact that we've got one, two, three pods that support our industry in one way, shape or form that are over a hundred episodes. I think Russell's three or 400. Amazing. That in itself is amazing. So just similar to our industries, we never went about it like there wasn't enough out there for us all to serve. We were all abundance mentality people and we couldn't have got here without support like that. So thanks, Mike.

Mike Sullivan [\(44:57\)](#):

Well, hey, the

James Cross [\(44:57\)](#):

House- All the work you do, man.

Mike Sullivan [\(45:00\)](#):

Well, I have such a wonderful team supporting me and I hope they realize I support them too. And my board of directors, when I submit my business plan to the board and it includes a line item for the podcast, I have yet to have any board member saying,

James Cross [\(45:20\)](#):

"What

Mike Sullivan [\(45:20\)](#):

Is this? What's the benefit of this? " And no question is probably a good question, but when I asked the question to our producer, I said, "How do I justify this? " He said, "You know, Mike, let's say you had 200 downloads or something." Says, "That's like you having coffee with 200 people. What's the value of that? "

James Cross [\(45:45\)](#):

Yeah, good

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

Point.

James Cross [\(45:46\)](#):

When someone shares their commute with you, think about how many people you would sit in a car and a commute with. I can't count any, maybe my wife or my kids, but sharing that time with someone, look, somebody said that to me, "I listen to you on the way to work every morning." Why? God, aren't you tired of me yet? Why? Yeah. But you think about that kind of commitment and you go, "Yeah, I'll probably get up and schedule that next one, or I'll work through some technical problems today to get that next one out. " It really motivates you. And like you said, those messages that show up at two o'clock in the morning on your LinkedIn and the next morning you see them and you go, "Wow, Mike

was thinking about me like, what is wrong with you, Mike?" It's very humbling and it definitely keeps you motivated and we didn't shine bigger lights and brighter lights on the good people out there doing the real work and what a great job to be able to do it.

Mike Sullivan ([46:53](#)):

Oh yeah. And again, I think the ability of you guys to take the podcast into the field, have those tailcake conversations, wow, that is something that I don't think I'll ever be able to do, but boy, would I ever love to, because it would require so much time and I couldn't do it, but would I ever love to do it? Because you're going to hear the real story. You know what? I think somebody might say, "Mike, you might think your system's all well and good, but here's the struggles I have with it. " And that means something because that's a user, man. That's a guy who uses it every

James Cross ([47:32](#)):

Day.

Mike Sullivan ([47:32](#)):

That's what I want to hear. But anyway-

James Cross ([47:36](#)):

I just want to tell you this one quick story. It's bad when you get two podcasters on, right? Oh yeah. It's been going for awhile. Post productions are shaking their heads. But that final year when we were able to get out to the field and really do the show that we always had in our head, one of the last trips we took was to Oakland and we were invited out by PG&E to sit down and talk about a really important topic, which was they were getting robbed, they were getting held up, they were getting stabbed, they were getting stuff stolen out of their trucks daily so much so that a group had come to, the union had come to them and really talked about how unsafe it was and they went to work on it. You talk about that feedback loop and safety culture. They took all that information and they had to get oversight, basically OPD and some outside firms to come in and basically guard them to do locates or guard them to turn a wrench.

([48:45](#)):

And we heard the stories directly from the folks that the stories came from, right? I'm talking to people that were out there that got stabbed and the people that were out there getting their stuff stolen and they had like a stand down type of culture. I mean, you were not going to get into an argument with somebody, just let them take whatever they want and get out alive. And the amount like sitting there in Oakland at their service center talking to their folks that had these firsthand stories and then listening to how they went to work on the problem, it was unreal. They were paying twice. They were paying another salary worth to each employee to keep them safe through Overwatch and through training programs. They had live action training that replicated those situations. They'd pull into the yard one morning, not know it and basically they'd have actors that were going to hold them up at gunpoint and virtual reality training.

([49:51](#)):

All these ways to get through this problem and we were hearing it directly from the folks that were impacted. It gives me cultures thinking about it, like talking about it. The fact that we were invited out into the place where it was happening, you talk about being in the trench or being close enough where that ground disturbance is happening, but talking to folks about real live action- Risk.

Yeah. In AOCs that we're not used to, we're used to blowing gas. We're trained for all these things, but not gunfire. People getting drug into customers' houses saying, "Get down their shooting again." I remember one guy telling me and I'm like, just trying to keep gas flowing at the end of the day, but those stories, man, that was what kept us going. That's what kept us being able to share that with the masses, that's stuff people need to hear and need to understand.

[\(50:58\)](#):

So we are blessed, Mike.

Mike Sullivan ([51:01](#)):

Yes, we are and I can't even imagine a situation like that. I did work in Columbia many years ago and I had to do training and all of that type thing. And we had bodyguards with us and armored vehicles, but that was just the way it was, right? But here you're in a situation where it's just so localized and how do we totally different than anything you would ever expect in your daily work life. Wow, that's a powerful story. It was something else. That's a powerful experience. Yeah. Yeah. James, thanks for doing this. Absolutely. I've been wanting to have you on the pod for a long time and a bit of a salute to you and Jim and James and- Likewise. ... for doing what you did for so long. And I hope that someday when I'm at an event down the road and maybe you guys are there, I'll get to stop in and say thanks in person again.

James Cross ([51:59](#)):

Maybe when we get to that 50th, Mike, we'll do a reunion now.

Mike Sullivan ([52:04](#)):

Well, I hope they invite me to it because I probably won't be around by

James Cross ([52:07](#)):

Then. Well, I will say that Jimmy knew I was coming on here this week and he sends us hellos and thank you for always supporting us. And man, it's been a blast catching up with you and man, thank you for everything you do seriously. Oh,

Mike Sullivan ([52:25](#)):

You're very

James Cross ([52:25](#)):

Welcome. We are a tight-knit group and like you said, very niche what we provide, but always appreciated your support.

Mike Sullivan ([52:34](#)):

Well, thank you, James. Thanks so much. 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 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@utility\_safety. We're also on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn. And if you'd like to send us a note, please do so. Maybe have an episode idea. Email us at [info@utilitysafety.ca](mailto:info@utilitysafety.ca) and put podcast in the subject header. I'm Mike Sullivan, President of Utility Safety Partners. I want to thank our guest today,

This transcript was exported on May 12, 2026 - view latest version [here](#).

James Cross, once again and remind everybody to click to know what's above and below. One click costs you nothing, not clicking, and that could cost you everything.