

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

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Mike ([00:38](#)):

Welcome everyone to the next episode of The Workplace Safety Review Podcast. We have a very special guest today, Tim Robson. Welcome Tim.

Tim Robson ([00:49](#)):

Thanks, Mike. I appreciate being here.

Mike ([00:52](#)):

Hey, we're honored to have you here.

Adam ([00:54](#)):

So Tim, we're really lucky to have Tim. And Tim, thanks for joining us. Tim is the Director of Tribalco's Rescue and Safety Division, and is responsible for supervising onsite technical rescue teams globally. And as a chief instructor, leads training courses around the world in confined space, high angle structural collapse, tactical, trench, and fall protection rescue. For 22 years, Tim has served as a rescue team manager, rescue squad officer, and safety officer for FEMA's/the Department of Homeland Security New Mexico Task Force One. He's participated in three national deployments for FEMA, including one to the Pentagon after 9/11 and two to the Gulf Coast for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

([01:46](#)):

While at the Pentagon, Tim led a rescue squad whose charter included victim recovery, debris removal, and the shoring of the remaining unstable structure. A new shoring system that he developed while on this deployment has since been incorporated into the Department of Homeland Security and other structural collapse training programs. Before his employment with Tribalco, Tim was a regional manager and chief instructor for Roco Rescue and also spent five years with the Albuquerque Fire Department where he was a firefighter and driver, and was responsible for the operation of numerous fire apparatus. He was also a member of the department's heavy tactical rescue team, which was responsible for confined space, trench, high angle, vehicle, and water and wilderness rescue. Tim, thanks again for coming on the podcast.

Tim Robson ([02:37](#)):

Really appreciate it, Adam. Thank you.

Adam ([02:39](#)):

So Tim, you've got tons of experience, but let's start with some easy ones. Tell us what is Tribalco and what do they do?

Tim Robson ([02:44](#)):

Tribalco is a global, I like to put it as a problem solver. We have multi-facets in the government sector, the federal sector, Department of Defense, all the alphabet names out there, where we provide critical

communication solutions from radios, to antenna systems to a full system from the ground up. But one thing that we really do that we're extremely proud of is we have very close relationship with the US Special Operations Command for the Department of Defense where we train, equip, and also maintain survival and safety systems for the different branches of the military that employ special operators. These are battlefield tested medical rescue and recovery systems that are tried and true. We have ongoing contracts with them. And Tribalco came to me and said, "Hey, we do this on the federal side, why can't we do it on the civilian, the commercial side?" And so that's what I'm responsible for. I'm responsible for the rescue and safety teams, personnel, equipment, compliance, for you name it. From the semiconductor industry to power generation, petrochemical. We have our teams all over the place supplying services.

Adam ([04:16](#)):

Let me ask you this. If you're in front of a group of people and you're training them on rescue, and I think a lot of us think about rescue teams as the heroes in society, what do you want to convey to those individuals, knowing of course that all the training in the world, you've still got to make split second life saving decisions in the moment? So what are you trying to convey to ensure these folks know how to properly complete a rescue in a really high tense situation?

Tim Robson ([04:45](#)):

Well, that's actually a really, really good question. So when we're on the civilian side, on the commercial side, we're supporting probably an OSHA, NFPA or an ANSI mandated requirement, typically OSHA. And so let's say you're inside of a fence line for refinery and you get told or you volunteer, I want to be on the technical rescue team for XYZ company. The big thing I stress to them, the difference between a 911 response, you call 911 and here's what we got versus your inside of a fence line. Now it's your employment requirement to be able to handle and mitigate that emergency. When you call 911, you don't know what you're showing up to. I've gone on a [inaudible 00:05:39], and it's an individual that's been shot four times, but when you're inside the fence line, it's your responsibility to know exactly what you're responding to.

([05:47](#)):

So that's the biggest thing I stress is there's a big difference between a municipal response versus a private response. The private response, you have to be ingrained in the system, you have to know everything that's going on. You have to be part of the process. When you call a municipal response, they're showing up to your emergency. When it's inside a fence line, you own that emergency. And that's the biggest way to train is these are people that you work with that you know, that you respond with and that makes a huge difference on how you respond.

Mike ([06:25](#)):

Yeah, that's a good answer, Tim. So it sounds like in the private sector, the key is making sure that if you have things that can go boom in the night, to be prepared for whatever type of emergency may happen inside the fence.

Tim Robson ([06:43](#)):

Exactly. And the way I describe it, after about five or six days of training the same folks in our classes, or even standing by with them, is again, when it's a 911 response, it is a true emergency. When it's inside the fence line, it's part of your job. So it shouldn't be an emergency because you've already pre-planned

it, you've already rigged up whatever equipment you can rig up for that emergency, whether it's a confined space event, trench or excavation, fall protection, whatever. You have to be able to respond in a timely manner and you have to be able to walk the walk, not just talk to talk.

(07:25):

So just like you said Mike, my no matter what the event is, unless it's some catastrophic, like a hurricane that's 50 miles wide. If it's a singular event, it really shouldn't be an emergency. It should be okay, we had an event, we've trained, we're prepared, we have everything documented, we know exactly what to do. It should be only a medical event and I'm able to handle it, no problem. But unfortunately that doesn't happen. I like to quote a famous boxer. "Everyone has a great plan until they get punched in the face."

Mike (08:05):

That's so true. That's so true.

Tim Robson (08:06):

On paper, it looks great, but when you actually have to do it, it's a whole different story.

Mike (08:11):

But when you have a plan in place, and you practice, and do all of those things that you talk about, I mean you really minimizing the risk of injury to workers as well as your operations. And based on my experience of practicing OSHA law for the last 20 years, a lot of companies are just way behind in this and are not really prepared for the inevitable. It's not a matter of if. It's a matter of when.

Tim Robson (08:41):

Right. And I know we're going to get into the most common things I see and stuff, but you think about it, no matter what you do to eliminate hazards, you can never eliminate the medical factor, the personal factor. And that's how I really train folks, is all right, you've done everything, you've done all your control, hazardous energies, you've done your work safe practices, all your permitting is in place, everything's perfect. Now, what happens if Fred has a heart attack inside of this reactor vessel that has a convoluted rescue process to get him out? That's how you have to plan. It's not for the known, it's for the unknown. And typically, I always throw, all right, you did all your lockout tagout, everything's good. Now he just had an anaphylactic reaction to a bee sting. What are you going to do?

Adam (09:33):

Before we get to some of the more common things that you see, I'm curious, going back to your mobster quote. I'm curious how you then train people to train them for the, I guess, I think it was Secretary Rumsfeld, the unknown unknown or the known unknown. Is it through just checklists? Is it through repetition? How exactly do you train someone to say, okay, you know how to do all the lockout tagout, but like you said, Fred just had a stroke in the middle of the vessel. So what do we do? So what are some of the tactics to give people the flexibility to use their training and then react to a situation that's at least somewhat unique?

Tim Robson (10:17):

And that right there is the crux of this whole thing is what do you do when something goes sideways? And the number one way is you have to be ingrained in the process, from planning all the way to

completion. Arrest, you're unfortunate ... Well, it's part of the world now is all the rescue teams, especially on the private side of the house, inside of a fence line, are collateral duty responsibilities. So you'll have an operator working a panel on a unit in a refinery, and he's also part of the rescue team. So where I stress to them is okay, and no insult to any operator out there, but if it's your loved one, and I always say it's your grandma because you can hate your mom, hate your dad, hate everybody in your family, but everyone pretty much loves their grandma. So that's who you're responding to. You're responding to Grandma May.

[\(11:13\)](#):

She fell down in a space, broke her hip, whatever. Do you want an operator trained as a rescuer or do you want a rescuer trained as an operator? And it's a big deal because we all know we have to do more with less in today's environment. And so the primary job function of an operator is being an operator. So he's going to receive all the training all the time to make sure he's good at being an operator, but how much time is he really going to receive as a rescuer? And that's when plant management has to figure that out is, do we have a lot of Grandma Mays that we need rescuing or potentially rescuing, and do we want to hire a trained rescue service that just does that? Or do we want to create our own rescue team and do that? And then how do we ingrain our collateral duty rescuers into this process?

[\(12:14\)](#):

And the good thing about the collateral duty, there's pluses and minuses to both of this. The good news about the collateral duty guys, the operator that's a rescuer, he knows the systems in and out. So he knows on a process vessel that this is where I do all my controls, this is how I make this safe. So their intimate knowledge of working inside that fence line prepares them for that rescue. And they know if I go stairwell one, I can get quicker, it's more expedient to get to the vessel than going stairwell two versus a private team or an offsite team responding. They're going to have to be directed where they need to go. So again you have to take the responsibility of someone's life depends on your ability to do your job and you better be good at it.

[\(13:10\)](#):

Because unfortunately, and Mike, you can probably speak volumes to this. So many rescuers end up perishing in certain types of events when they really shouldn't have, or would be rescuers, a good Samaritan or whatever. They normally end up doing something that they're not trained, equipped, or really should be involved in, but they're trying to do the right thing. And unfortunately they become a statistic.

Mike [\(13:38\)](#):

And that's what your team can prevent is for folks like that from being a statistic, either you're in control, complete controlled emergency rescue, or you're partnering up with your clients on the ground and doing it together.

Tim Robson [\(13:55\)](#):

Exactly. And we have certain contracts where we do the day to day program management for fall protection and confined space. Two of the main fatality prevention programs, the clients have turned it over to us and said, "We'll manage it at a top level, but you're responsible for the daily integration, compliance, safety, everything other than the actual control of hazardous energies." Because we're not an "affected employee" but we'll set up fall protection so that the client can rest easily that one, they have a well known, well trained, very good at what we do team providing this service. So now I don't have to put, potentially, my employees at risk.

Mike ([14:50](#)):

Exactly. Hey, Tim, what are some of the most, I guess you could say, common, non-compliance issues in the rescue world that you have seen in the private sector?

Tim Robson ([15:04](#)):

Well, obviously when it comes to technical rescue, the main ones, there's three of them. There's probably confined spaces, permit required confined spaces, fall protection in general, and trenching and excavation. So what I see a lot of is once you check a box and say, okay, this is a permit required confined space, or when it comes to a fall potential, I can't restrain an employee, I can't eliminate the fall hazard. Now I'm going to make them wear PPE to control the hazard, not eliminate it. Employers sometimes, and employees also, they circumvent the state or federal regulatory requirements so that even though it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck, they call it something else.

([15:58](#)):

So in regards to confined spaces, probably one of the most common things I see is a known permit required confined space in this operating condition is for a better word, pencil whipped and said, okay, now it's [inaudible 00:16:12], we're going to reclassify this even though the entrants are wearing PPE all the way up to respiratory protection. Because they're introducing a hazard into this supposedly inert, no hazard associated with whatsoever. But they're introducing hazards in, they still call it a non permit space, which now eliminates the need for a rescue team, a permit, and all the regulatory requirements. So that's probably one of the most common is just reclassifying non-permit spaces when they really should be permit required confined spaces.

([16:50](#)):

Fall protection, that's a biggie. You ask probably 50% of the workforce out there, what heights do you need to be protected? And everyone's like six feet, four feet, even though it's really any impact to any surface or falling through a surface. But the one I find the most is the rigging of fall protection for personal fall arrest to where they're working under the general industry requirements, which is four feet and everything they have on is for six feet. So they're standing on a ladder at 4 feet, 12 inches working off of it. They don't have three points of contact or two points of contact, and they're reaching over and they have a six foot lanyard on them. They'll hit the ground before the lanyard even has a chance to deploy. And then the inability to get a suspended worker. Again, that whole analogy of, you think you got everything figured out until something bad happens.

([17:48](#)):

You've got everyone wearing fall protection, you're doing what you think is due diligence to protect your employees. But now someone actually falls. Now it's soup sandwich. No one knows what's going on. It's a Chinese fire drill. We're trying to get a guy down - with a ladder on a forklift. And I've seen all of this. Unfortunately, no one thinks about it until it's too late. And so that's probably the biggest.

([18:15](#)):

And then when it comes to trench and excavation, probably the biggest thing entrench and excavation is benching type C soil. You're not allowed to bench type C soil and probably inside of a fence line, everything is type C soil unless it's stable rock. And to save time, money, shoring and protection, they just start benching it and call it good rather than sloping it or putting in an internal shoring system. And all of these, that's the crux of this whole podcast is once you start to recognize hazards, now it makes you responsible to eliminate those hazards. And unfortunately, there's loopholes, there's ways to be

circumvent it that aren't necessarily the right thing to do. And unfortunately, the workers are the ones that end up getting impacted by it.

Mike ([19:11](#)):

Tim, in a nutshell, why do we keep reading about so many trenching and excavation fatalities? I mean, OSHA has had a national inspection program for trenching and excavation since 1985. It just seems like every two weeks I'm reading about somebody dying in a trench.

Tim Robson ([19:32](#)):

Exactly. And I do a lot of trench and excavation class, I do [inaudible 00:19:38] person classes. And this is the number one thing that's brought up is why are so many people getting impacted by trenches? And the problem is, in my doing this for quite a while, responding to trench emergencies is one, it's costly to make a trench safe. So if you have to rent, you're a smaller business and you have to put a shoring system in a trench or excavation that's greater and five feet in depth, now you have an outlay of a cost to a trench box. When the old salt, I've done this for 20 years, I've never seen this type of soil collapse. So we're not going to pay for a trench box. We're going to get a worker in there, do a quick pipe connection and we don't have to worry about it. And bam, that's when something bad comes along.

([20:30](#)):

One of the other ones I see quite a lot in going to client's facilities, doing a field trip and looking at all the excavations they have. One of the biggest things is they don't have the ability to actually create an excavation out of a trench. A trench has straight vertical walls, greater than five feet in vertical depth. So what they try to do is they try to ... I don't know what the right ... Fudge the standard, the 1926 standard, and they'll make a hybrid sort of protection system. So if your trench is eight feet deep, your typical trench, six to eight feet deep, four foot wide, if you try and slope it to make it an excavation so it's no longer a trench, you're going to have something that's over 20 feet wide. And there is no footprint on any plant nowadays where I can make an excavation 20 feet wide because there's just not enough room.

([21:30](#)):

So now we have so many vertical walls and unfortunately, hey, this shoring system doesn't work for me. I can't install this pipe or whatever correctly or utility. So hey, I'm going to pull the trench box out, we're going to just drag the lip a little bit, knock it down, make it a step or whatever, and then all of a sudden, something bad happens. So a lot of times, the working environment, it just impacts the ability for an excavation to truly be protected. And looking at through probably your eyes, Mike, that's an unacceptable answer. An employee's wellbeing takes precedence over everything. But again, the way an owner looks at it is totally different sometimes. This was a hard bid, there's no more time and materials, we're already over on this job, I'm losing my shirt on this job, we've got to get it done. So it puts that undue pressure on the worker to get it done.

Adam ([22:35](#)):

Yeah, that's a great point, Tim, there is that push pull pressure. So last question for you, and we may be opening up Pandora's Box here, but you've been involved in a lot of rescue situations, 9/11 of course being one of them, a big one. But looking back, and certainly you can use 9/11 as an example, is there anything you sort took from an experience and said, hey, that worked really well, or hey, that really didn't work? I'm just of curious based on your experience, what you've seen that works really well and what maybe doesn't work so well?

Tim Robson ([23:15](#)):

Probably the biggest thing I can say to that is know what you're involved in. Granted, an airborne missile, like an airplane flying into a building, who could prepare for that? That's such a massive event. But at Hurricane Katrina, people criticized so much stuff that went on, but I was there for 30 days. A lot of things people were saying weren't happening, there was a lot of false information. But probably the biggest thing, whether you're a local response capability or private response capability is when it's time to step up to the plate, you better be prepared and equipped and trained to do what you can do. Unfortunately at 9/11, I had people showing up saying, "Hey, I have a search dog that you guys can use." And we're going, "Okay, that's great, but finding your kid in the woods isn't the kind of search dog we need." It's logistics. There's so much that I can answer that logistics are a big issue.

([24:25](#)):

We had to put up so much shoring inside of the Pentagon. For anyone that knows the size of the Pentagon, we had one full parking lot sector full of lumber just for shoring. The enormity of that situation was massive. When we got there at night, that night, I just looked at it and I go, "How the hell am I going to handle this?" And you fall back to your training, you fall back to what you know is right. My main job is every single one of my rescuers goes home at the end of the day. And my secondary job is every one of our clients go home at the end of the day. So I will risk probably the best thing for any emergency, I will risk a lot to save a lot. I will risk nothing to save nothing. Running into an explosive environment where there's no protection whatsoever, you're going to become a statistic.

([25:19](#)):

But can I back people out of the area so in case there's a secondary explosion or an event to where less people are impacted. And having your wits about you, being able to take a deep breath, hopefully in a clean environment, that the atmosphere is not bad. But take a deep breath, step back and just, how do I do this rather than just trying to shotgun it, throw darts, close your eyes, hope this works? Because unfortunately, there's a very limited amount of people that do what we do for a living. And too many of us are actually not going home at the end of the day, whether we're injured or God forbid, killed. So know what you're signed up for. That's a biggie. If you're going to do this, you better be prepared to do it. And the second is, calm heads will always prevail. If I can just really take in the big picture, see what needs to be done, and then rely on what you know.

Mike ([26:24](#)):

Terrific. Tim, this has been an awesome podcast. We learned a lot today about emergency rescue and the services that Tribalco can offer, and the importance of being prepared, and how you guys can partner with folks and minimizing the risks to their operations and the private sector. So we really appreciate you being on the show today.

Tim Robson ([26:48](#)):

Well, I really appreciate you guys asking me. I'd love to do this again. The more we can just try and keep people safe. You never want to see a rescuer doing their job. If you see us doing our job, something bad's happened.

Mike ([27:02](#)):

And that is the end of this episode. Stay tuned to the next episode of The Workplace Safety Review Podcast. Stay safe, everybody.