"A unfortunate event resulting especially from carelessness or ignorance" or "an unforeseen and unplanned event or circumstance" is how merriam-webster.com defines an accident. No one plans an accident. You don’t leave your house in anticipation of a fender bender; nor do jobsite and work-place accidents schedule a time — they happen. Unfortunately, you can be doing all the right things and wearing the proper personal protective equipment (PPE), and still the unmentionable happens.

Recently, our parent company asked each of the divisions to conduct a safety stand-down. What made this event different was that it was being tailored to the individual divisions and areas that affected them on a day-to-day basis. While there was still focus on bentonite plant and office safety, our division focused more on jobsites and travel issues. While some precautions overlapped, our field team had some very group-specific issues to address.

As a producer of bentonite, polymers and additives used in the drilling industry, the team makes regular site visits to consult and advise on the use of our product. Steel-toed boots, hard hats, safety vests, eye and ear protection, and respirators are required gear; on certain jobsites, regulations may require dielectric boots and overshoes.

Something as simple as a safety vest can require thought, depending on the jobsite location. Do you know when you need a Class 2 versus a Class 3 safety vest? Are you wearing the proper safety vest for the jobsite you are on?

- Class 2 vests are needed on a roadway where traffic exceeds 25 mph. These vests do not have sleeves.
- Class 3 vests must be used when working on a roadway where traffic exceeds 50 mph. Class 3 is usually used by roadway construction workers, utility workers and emergency service personnel. Class 3 vests have sleeves because the ANSI code states that the vests in this class must have retro-reflective material between the shoulder and elbow.

Hard hats, safety glasses and other PPE all have specific designations like the vests. It is recommended that you discuss your needs with your PPE supplier.

Each industry we serve is very different depending on product usage, site footprint and site-specific regulations. A foundation site will have a series of tank farms that require steps, catwalks and certain risks while sampling the fluids. Drill shaft safety includes watching for open shafts that only have caution tape for protection, never touching or leaning on the ‘can’ during drilling operations, and being aware of moving vehicles and overhead cranes. Slip and fall risk, when working around polymer or clay slurries, requires extra care during cold-weather operations.

While horizontal directional drilling (HDD) has some of the same slip and fall risks, an HDD job will have an additional set of risks. During our stand-down the group provided the following list of safety precautions when on an HDD jobsite. While this partial list was developed by our technical managers, it is good for any workers pulling samples onsite.

- Do not lean on or touch the rig or the driller. Stay clear of the safety zone around the rig (marked with safety tape or cones).
- In the event that the electrical strike alarm sounds, stand still and do not move until the source has been disengaged or the site safety coordinator instructs you.
- When taking mud samples, inform the driller you are going to take a sample. Do not approach the pit until drilling has stopped. Additionally, on deep pits ensure that a steel safety box is in place to prevent cave-ins.

During the stand-down, we also discussed travel, both domestic and overseas. To reduce distracted driver accidents, best practice is to set up hands-free phone systems and adjust mirrors prior to exiting rental car lots. Pulling over during intense conversations (hands free or not) is a good idea, so concentration is not diverted. In addition, use caution whenever exiting taxi or ride-share vehicles in high-traffic areas.

You can be doing everything right at a jobsite or during travel and still get hurt. Accidents occur even when we try to anticipate and prepare. Activities like mud sampling are easy to set safety rules for; it is the human factor that cannot be anticipated. I can offer a few examples:

- On a recent jobsite a worker was refueling the rig. A normal task, right? Then my technical manager noticed the lit cigarette in his hand. These types of incidents need to be reported to the site management immediately.
- What about the simple act of looking up prior to raising the derrick on a water well rig? It sounds simple, yet we hear of derricks being raised into the electrical wires every year.
- Unsecure drill rigs or uneven ground can also be accidents waiting to happen.

My team is an extension of our drill-er when on their site. Our safety protocol should be an example and our professionalism expected. Contractors, inspectors and all others need to be aware of the surroundings and remember that we work in a dangerous environment. Report unsafe acts and keep safety first and foremost. In the end, the goal for all of us is to return home alive.

Todd Tannehill is vice president of CETCO Drilling Products, a Mineral Technologies Inc. company. For more Drilling Fluids columns, visit www.nationaldriller.com/drillingfluids.