It was a nice day in central Oklahoma. The seismic crew was located a few miles south of Norman, home of the University of Oklahoma. For some unexplained reason, several crew members had gathered around a shot hole, watching the shooter make up a charge. Luckily, the recording truck was farther away from the shot, probably to avoid the hole blow. No one knows what happened next. A massive explosion killed all of the nearby crew members and left the observer in a dazed state.

A marine research crew was going through the routine chores of acquiring seismic data. The recording boat was in communication with the shooting boat. Onboard the shooting boat, a member of the research team was busyly making up charges, which would be tossed overboard and detonated. No one knows what happened next. There was an explosion on the shooting boat, killing the young man making up the charges.

Both of the above accidents were well chronicled. Both were avoidable. These were not natural disasters — no earthquake, no hurricane, and no volcano. The first one occurred on a Petty seismic crew and resulted in the creation of written and strongly enforced instructions to field crews on the handling of explosives. The marine accident caused Ewing/Worzel (Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory) to ask a technician to come up with a nonexplosive source. That chap subsequently developed the Bolt air gun. And we don’t toss explosives off the back of shooting boats anymore!

Ian Threadgold is the chair of SEG’s Health, Safety, Security, and Environment Committee. Wow! Thank you for your kindness. I quote Ian:

“You may remember that SEG had a Safety Committee which compiled annual geophysical accident reports. This function of trying to capture information on fatalities in the geophysical industry passed over to the International Association of Geophysical Contractors (IAGC) in the early 1980s. A few years ago, the IAGC and Oil and Gas Producers (OGP) geophysical safety committees started to compile an industry fatality database that was named the Aide Memoir for Geophysical Risk Assessors, under the leadership of Eelco Sixma, currently with CGG, formerly with Shell.

“The goal was to collect and make available information to prevent similar incidents from recurring. It allows companies to perform well-informed and consistent risk assessments across the industry... it continues. The project also allows assembly of the collective ‘memory’ of the industry before the ‘big crew change.’

“The IAGC is still assembling information on incidents for the database, and the 1950s, ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s have... fewer reports. Please ask your readers to send in any information they may have related to fatal accidents in our industry. A simple form for providing information can be accessed on the IAGC Web site http://www.iagc.org/files/2230/. Any information should be sent to IAGC’s Tim Fransiolli, at tim.fransiolli@iagc.org. The data are kept anonymous, with no country, company, contractor, or victim information recorded. To reduce the possibility of entering duplicate events, only the year of the accident is saved. The IAGC is not asking for formal accident reports (although those would be best). In fact, it accepts data from ‘memory,’ provided the source has firsthand knowledge of the event, i.e., we must avoid ‘hearsay.’”

Threadgold is appealing to us older chaps, before the big crew change. Egad! We need to move along! Let’s start with the people who can still remember as far back as the 1950s. Think about accidents you somehow have been associated with. You may have firsthand knowledge. Fortunately for me, all of my information about terrible accidents is second-, third-, or fourth-hand. Actually, all of the service companies with which I have been associated are dedicated to safety. This is enforced by top management. Sometimes it gets a little silly. Many of us remember the crew parties that were a result of being accident free for some period of time. From the financial side, the number of lost-time accidents is taken seriously. Accidents hurt employees and hurt their companies through lost time on the job.

I know that talking about safety is rather boring unless you were involved in an unavoidable accident. Think of the stern of a modern seismic boat, with its myriad cables and lines being towed, reeled in and out. I shudder to consider the possibilities. I recall the towed “birds” when acquiring air-mag data. There was an ax (or something) available to jettison the cable if the “bird” got tangled up with an immovable object or the airplane was experiencing too much drag. I’ve never heard of an ax being used, but it was there. Remember, we need more data before the big crew change.