FLIGHT PLANS AND FLEXCHECKS
WHY PLANNING SAVES LIVES

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At first glance, an airplane and a drilling rig seem worlds apart.
One confronts the earth's depths; the other navigates the skies. Yet beneath their differences lies a shared truth: neither environment forgives shortcuts or lack of planning. In both domains, operational discipline is paramount.

A single mistake, such as an improperly operated valve on a rig or a misstep during takeoff or landing, can have catastrophic consequences. That's why rig managers, drillers and pilots must adhere to a fundamental principle: meticulous planning is essential for safe and successful operations.

Before an airplane takes off, the pilot conducts rigorous preflight preparations. This includes reviewing weather conditions, flight paths and aircraft weight and balance. The pilot performs thorough inspections and uses a checklist to confirm all procedures are complete, setting altimeters, checking flight controls and configuring navigation systems. Each step is critical to ensure the aircraft's readiness and the safety of its passengers.

In the drilling world, this process is mirrored by pre-job planning. Teams define the work scope and identify, control and eliminate hazards before starting any task. Safety tools are integral to this phase. Job safety analyses are used to outline task steps, potential hazards and mitigation measures. Critical verifications, such as those in the FlexChecks system, focus on steps that work to ensure a safe operating enviornment. These include setting up barricades around pipe delivery systems, establishing buffer zones to prevent unauthorized access and confirming the correct elevators and lift subs are used by checking gauges and threads. Preoperational inspections of equipment and personal protective gear are also conducted.

Once preparations are complete, the pilot confirms that everyone is in position and all systems are functioning before proceeding with takeoff, pending air traffic control authorization. Similarly, the driller or rig manager ensures personnel are in place and ready to perform their tasks. For example, during a connection, employees enter the rig floor around the rotary table to operate the ST80 and make the connection. Once complete, they promptly exit the area to minimize exposure to hazards such as dropped objects.

"We've all experienced the frustration of a flight delay due to technical or mechanical issues. When a pilot encounters a problem during preflight checks, they stop the process until it's resolved. Similarly, in our world, when there are changes in roles, weather, equipment damage or unexpected exposures, it's crucial to stop, regroup and identify, remove or control the new exposures before proceeding."

In both aviation and drilling, a relentless commitment to planning and safety protocols underscores the importance of preparation. This shared dedication to meticulous execution ensures the safety and success of operations, whether in the skies or beneath the earth's surface.

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