

Pipeline snakes across county

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Roads 67 and 5 south of Kanorado, where the main welding gang was working.

The welding foreman of Spread 2, Dana Bratcher from south Texas, was talking to Ecklund about a scratch on one of the 78-foot sections of pipe that was being welded as part of a curve in the line.

Ecklund and Bratcher knelt down to check the scratch with inspector John "Red" Peebles. Each one felt along the scratch, which was about six inches long and was into the pipe itself.

"The red coating on the pipe is important," Ecklund said. "We don't want any breaks in the coating, but if it is a simple scratch, we patch it.

"However, this scratch is deeper, and we will have to cut a section of the pipe out and replace it.

"It looks like it was done when it was bent, but it could have been done at another time."

He said each section is inspected when it is put on the rail car and there are at least three or four ropes to keep the pipe sections separated, both on the rail cars, stacked in storage and on the trucks hauling them to the field.

Bratcher wanted to make it clear that his welding crew was not responsible for the scratch, and not to have it listed as a bad weld that caused the section to be cut out. He said the welders are from union Local 798 of Tulsa, Okla.

Ecklund, who coordinates the efforts of the three sections of the 380-mile project, said he would make sure the welding gang was not flagged for this problem.

As the inspectors and foremen checked out the scratch, the long-necked tractors, carrying mobile welding shacks, rolled along the line, stopping at each joint to drop



Welders and the portable shacks prepare to move onto another section of the Cheyenne Plains gas pipeline south of Kanorado. Photos by Tom Betz / The Goodland Star-News

down and allow crew using mechanized welders to seal the outside of each joint.

The welding shacks are like little white buildings with fold-up floors and air conditioning. They have a cutout on each side the size of the pipe. The tractors move the shacks into place, the shacks drop down, the floors ease underneath the pipe and it takes less than five minutes for the mechanized welding gear to make a complete circle. Then the shacks fold up and move on to the next joint.

Once the crews are done, the welds are inspected, and if there is a bad one, a follow up shack is dropped onto the section to fix the weld.

Ecklund said he gets a check of the number of welds completed at 10 a.m. every morning of both the main welding gang and the mini gang, which works on special sections. That Saturday morning, the main gang had done 64 welds with no bad welds and the mini gang had done 25 with no bad welds. The main gang had covered nearly a

mile and the mini gang had done about 2,000 feet of pipeline.

Ecklund said he coordinates the process with Lynn Christensen, the overall project manager, and they travel among the three sections overseeing the progress of the project.

"I have an apartment in Stratton," Ecklund said, "but I am hardly there more than a day or two a week."

Bratcher said he has been enjoying the area's restaurants, and had heard that Big Ed's in Bird City was the best place for a steak.



Lars Ecklund and inspector John Peebles inspect a scratch that will require a section of pipe to be cut out and replaced.

Pipeline construction done in 10 phases

The pipe-laying process has about 10 phases, says Lars Ecklund, project construction coordinator for the Cheyenne Plains gas pipeline, with clearing and grading the right of way first.

Ecklund said the first crew also builds gates through fences, adding that there were more than 40 gates in the second section.

Trenching the ditch for the pipe is the next phase, followed by stringing the pipe sections alongside the ditch. Ecklund said once the pipe is strung along the ditch, the bending crew is next to arrive. Where there are curves or valleys and hills that have to be crossed, the sections are bent to exact specifications.

The preparation gang is next. Each section of pipe gets a lip on each end, prepared with a cutting machine that gets the edges ready for welding. With this crew are workers who stop at each section and use magnets to pick up metal filings from the cutting machine.

"We don't want anything buried with the pipe that might scratch the coating," Ecklund said. "With care in handling the pipe, it will be in excellent shape for many years in the future."

The mini-gang, a welding crew, moves ahead of the main gang and welds the special sections where

there are bends. The first part of both the mini and main crews is an automatic welding machine which joins the pipe sections from the inside. Mounted on a long pipe, the welder is slid along inside the pipe sections as they are lifted into position.

Each section of pipe is raised about three feet off the ground, and wooden skids are used to support the sections while the welding is done. The pipeline is raised to allow the floor of portable welding shacks to slip underneath.

Once the pipe sections are welded, the ends are capped until they are ready for final assembly. Welds are inspected on each section, and where there are scratches, they are patched, and the joints are coated to make them moisture proof.

As the assembled pipe sections are joined, they are again inspected and coated before being lifted into the trench. The pipe is surveyed to make sure it is in the proper position before the trench is filled. Sections are hydrotested for leaks before the final phase is begun.

Recovering the topsoil and restoration of the ground is the final phase. Once the construction is complete the entire pipeline will be pressure tested before it can be placed into service.

County, fire board, review purchase policy

POLICY, from Page 1

policy. In-county suppliers have been complaining the fire departments buy too much from out of the county.

"We want to have as much purchased locally as possible," Tiede said, "and wanted to find out how the purchase of fire equipment was handled."

Duell said the fire board left most of the purchasing up to the chiefs, but the board handled the purchase of big items like fire trucks.

Dennis Bentzinger of Med Enterprises Fire Extinguishers, who has a contract with Sherman County for the inspection, testing and repair of the county fire extinguishers, had raised the issue with commissioners on August 31. Bentzinger said

he has not been asked to bid on any of the fire equipment.

Tiede said it would be good if Bentzinger let the fire chiefs know what he sells and get the information to the fire board and the chiefs.

"I don't know what he (Bentzinger) sells," Chief Griffith said, "and we do have vendors call on us. It is hard to remember who sells fire equipment.

"I admit it is hard to break an old habit and order from someone new. It is easy when a salesman calls to say, 'Yes, we need this, go ahead and get it.'"

"We had a department head meeting," Commissioner Kevin Rasure said, "and said we were going to try to work with local vendors."

"Yes, but the local guys have to

let us know what they have," Griffith replied.

"I thought that was made clear at the meeting," Rasure said.

"It is not all his fault," Griffith said.

Tiede asked about six fire nozzles that were purchased Weis Fire Safety Equipment from Salina.

Griffith said three were for a new truck and three were replacements.

"I did not call him (Bentzinger)," Griffith said. "That is my fault. I just didn't do it."

"That's my frustration," Rasure said.

"Most vendors put out a catalog to look at," Chief Crumrine said. "I have never met Bentzinger, nor have I gotten a book from him.

"He's never come to me to ask

about fire equipment. Other vendors stop by my farm or stop at the Brewster Co-op and talk to Assistant Chief Rex Jamison."

"We need to try to buy as much as possible locally," Tiede said. "We need to watch it a lot closer."

Commissioner Chuck Thomas asked Griffith if he usually buys for all the departments or whether each chief buys what he needs.

"Usually each one buys what they need," Griffith said. "Sometimes we can do better by purchasing together."

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