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## **The Hard Truth About Pipeline Welding**

Welding is an often misunderstood profession. It can take years of experience to be an efficient welder, and welders that work on pipelines are some of the best in their respective trade. Pipeline welding is a niche job market, and only a select few have the skill set and mental fortitude it takes to work long hours in extreme weather conditions with demanding tasks and expectations.

While pipeline welders enjoy many benefits and perks of their job, there are many aspects of the trade to learn before considering pursuing a career “laying beads”.

### **Income and Expenses**

Matt Mote is a certified weld inspector(CWI) in the industry, and he spent 10 years welding on the pipeline in Texas before transitioning to become a CWI. He has worked for several companies over the years and currently works for Enterprise Products, one of the largest natural gas and crude oil pipeline companies in North America.

“I got into welding for the money. I didn’t really care about anything else at first, but I had a lot to learn,” said Mote. While pipeline welders do make a lot of money, they have a lot of expenses to cover.

Mote said that most pipeline welders in Texas make anywhere from \$70,000 to over \$150,000 annually, based upon how much time they spend on working on the line. Additionally, when starting on a new welding job they also have to wait about two weeks for their first paycheck, and most inexperienced welders do not take that into account.

According to Mote, oil and gas companies don't usually cover fuel costs or room and board. Many pipeliners stay in hotels or RVs, however if the work site is in an oil and gas rich area the prices for room and board are generally much higher. Some pipeline welders choose to live further from the job site and drive a longer distance on a daily basis, but the money they save on a hotel or RV park is offset and spent on diesel to get to the job site.

Pipeline job sites are also constantly moving, so that means welders have to move all over with their jobs constantly. Mote said about all the moving, "It gets lonely. I spent six months in West Texas without seeing my little girl and that was rough." For many welders with families, the time spent on the road away from loved ones is not worth the pay.

Mote decided to transition to becoming a CWI after he grew weary of the demanding aspects of being a pipeline welder and all of the traveling. "I got an opportunity for a permanent inspecting job in Houston, and I never thought twice about it," he said.

### **Working Conditions and Expectations**

Tony Reina is the operating manager of Kay Services Inc., a pipeline maintenance company based out of West Columbia, Texas. Before switching to the industrial maintenance side of the industry, Reina spent over 25 years welding on pipelines all over the United States.

Reina said that working conditions on the pipeline can be grueling, as welders are expected to work tirelessly in the extreme heat and cold with little reprieve. They are also expected to work extremely long hours and potentially seven days a week depending on the urgency of the job.

Welders on the pipeline are held to a high standard with little margin for error, Reina stated. The turnover rate for welders is extremely high, and one or two mistakes can get you

fired. A pipeline crew needs to be efficient and move quickly along the line, and if a welder is hindering progress for the rest of the crew he won't be cut much slack.

As for the actual welding process, it is meticulous and requires lots of attention to detail from every welder on the crew. The pipe gang uses special pipeline equipment called side booms to pick up each joint of pipe, align it with the previous joint, and make the first part of the weld.

Additional filler passes are made by welders who immediately follow the stringer bead on what is referred to as the welding firing line. The firing line is made up of stringers, hot-pass and capping welders, and they are followed in certain locations by tie-in welders. After this process is completed the crew moves along to the next section of pipe and repeats the process over and over again.

Welding on a pipeline is a challenging job with high expectations, but if you can stick out the tough working conditions, high expenses and moving around often, it pays very well. Reina's advice to new pipeline welders is simple, "Start small. Work your way up from the bottom and don't get ahead of yourself. Soak up as much information as possible and hang out with the older guys because they might know a thing or two."

**Source Page**

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