

Post Independent

Working on the drilling rig in Garfield County

By [Pete Fowler](#)
[Glenwood Springs, CO Colorado](#)
April 27, 2008

PARACHUTE, Colorado — In his drilling crew, Kevin Eastman is the worm. That's the lowest ranked of five standard positions on a drill rig, the worker who supports the other positions, he said.

There's also the motor man, who tends to about six diesel engines. And a chain hand wraps chains around drilling pipe. The chain is used to spin the pipes together or apart. The motor man, chain hand and worm make up the three floor hand positions responsible for all the maintenance and supporting the other positions.

Upward in the hierarchy, there's also a derrick hand who climbs high up — sometimes 80 feet or more — on the rig and wrestles with large and heavy pieces of pipe to stand them up on end in the derricks. And the driller stands at the drilling station and controls rig operations.

“When we're pulling 350,000 pounds of steel out of the hole he's got to make sure we don't get hung up on a rock or anything,” Eastman said.

Eastman says working a drill rig is physically demanding.

“It takes very tough, determined people to stay in this field,” he said. “It's a lot of abuse. Most roughnecks are kind of tall and lean. They're just real wiry, super-strong.”

Eastman said the toughest part of the job is “tripping pipe” because of the repetition over long hours. It involves either connecting or disconnecting 30-foot, 750 pound sections of pipe as they go into or out of the ground. One tool the crew uses is a 600 pound pair of tongs connected to a counterweight. It looks like a giant pipe wrench.

The rig and its crew are a valuable commodity. A natural gas company pays \$17,000 to a contract company for 24 hours of the rig's operation, Eastman said. But it's no walk in the park.

“It's really physically demanding,” he said. “You have to be in amazing shape. You have to have a lot of endurance. You have to be very quick-witted. You can't be a slow-minded person where you process things slow because you get to the point where everything is reflex. If it's not reflex, you'll get killed or seriously hurt.”

The tough work can attract a tough crowd.

“Every little nucleus of five guys — they think they're the toughest guys on the planet,” Eastman said.

A well worn safety helmet sits on a truck outside of the old Super Eight Hotel in Parachute on Thursday afternoon. Many gas workers stay in local hotels in between shifts on oil and gas rigs.

Chad Spangler |
Post Independent



[Click to Enlarge](#)

[Browse and Buy](#)
[Post Independent Photos](#)

[BACK](#) ←