

# [***-Marathon Petroleum Corporation - Building a mountainside pipeline***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5X64-BD61-JD3Y-Y0J6-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

When building on the side of a mountain, the direction one builds depends on who you ask, because it's really based on personal preference as opposed to an engineering schematic.

'In my opinion, I would rather build up the hill rather than down the hill. Some guys will tell you just the opposite,' says Pat Rudy, engineering manager, gathering and compression. 'Either case this requires a very in-depth plan and pre-inspection program due to the required winch system used to build mountain pipelines.'

A recently completed phase of a 120-mile pipeline project from Sherwood processing facility in West Union, West Virginia, to a fractionator at the Hopedale facility in Ohio, included 60 miles through the Appalachia mountain range.

The line was built along some of the most challenging conditions imaginable, including 40-degree slopes, with as much as an 800-foot elevation change in places. And permits for river crossings necessitated working around the clock to minimize the impact on the ***environment***.

'This is the hardest work we do in my groups' said Rudy. 'It's very complicated work that has to be well planned and well designed. Working on 40 plus degree slopes requires experienced hill crews working in the mountains. Not all pipeliners can work in this ***environment***.

'When working on a mountainside, everything you do is hard. Everything takes twice as long as on a normal project.'

Every aspect of the project was impacted and driven by the unique working conditions. From getting the workers, equipment and pipe to the worksite, to staging everything on the side of a mountain that first had to be cleared of dense forestry.

'In most places, we had to build our own access roads,' recalled Rudy. 'Even the local county roads were just one-lane dirt roads. In some cases, we were actually improving the county roads, just so we can get to the project area.'

The path of the project was so isolated in some areas that it also limited GPS and cellphone communications. Temporary boosters and power were brought in to address the situation, but even that had limitations.

'Some of the areas were so remote that you would get a call from someone saying, 'I'm going to be out of service for the next couple of hours',' recalled Rudy. 'There was just nothing you could do. Everything that you are used to that makes your job easier, doesn't work anymore.'

But the single biggest impact on the conditions was the weather. Specifically, the rain. Precipitation that would be shrugged off on a normal worksite became cause for alarm.

'I never saw the weather impact a project like this one,' said Sr. Project Manager Dustin Vincent. 'A half-inch of rain would make the ground so slick, you could not climb to the worksite using your hands and feet. And if you did, you could slide all the way to the bottom.'

'Weather was a large factor,' said Rudy. 'When you're dealing with these severe slopes, it was like the raging rapids every time it rains. And if the weather conditions changed just slightly, the site changed from being safe to unsafe.

When building a new pipeline, a straight line is always the shortest distance between two points. But for this project, the team looked to get high, and stay there.

'We tried to pick new terrain to get on and ride the ridge tops,' said Rudy. That would let us stay flat as long as possible before coming back down.'

The project also utilized civil and geo engineers to install hill-side drainage systems, ensuring natural spring water was directed away from the newly-installed pipe. This can prevent erosion beneath the project and avert a potential landslide.

Recently completed phase 3 of the project from the Sherwood processing facility in West Union to the Mobley processing facility in Pine Grove. The final phase will be completed in 2021 consisting of 39 miles of mountain terrain.

'In our type of work, a lot of projects are schedule-driven,' noted Rudy. 'Working in the mountains takes more time and planning to make sure we complete on time and, most importantly, finish incident and accident-free.'

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