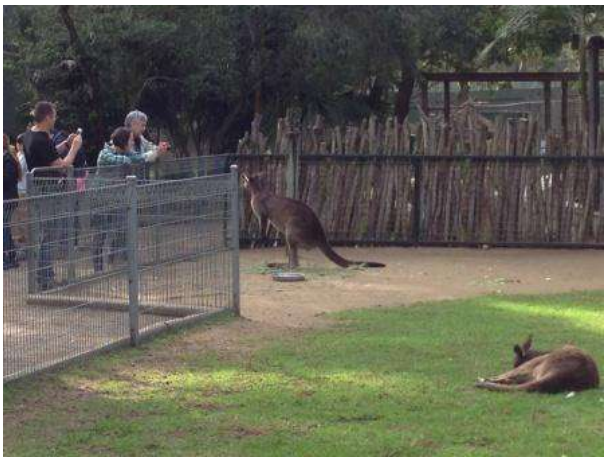
Business has remained exceptionally slow all summer. I remain optimistic that we will get back to normal operating levels this fall but it is not a sure thing. We have recently landed a couple of nice international orders but the domestic business remains something of a question mark.

We did get another Tech meeting accomplished – this time in Sydney Australia. Most of the Asian, European and Australian based Techs were in attendance. Much of the content was the same as for the Lexington Tech meeting with some additional conversation on local issues in Asia.

In addition to the classroom meeting, we also accomplished a short training session with the Eurotherm recorder and test fired the Australian sets at the shop in Wetherill Park.

Although social activities weren't the primary purpose of the meeting, it was great to be able to spend time with our folks that we don't often see in the US. We attended a Penrith Panthers rugby game (they got trounced), met some family members, and even had a little time for tourist activities.



I hope that these Tech meeting are beneficial. The only time we can dedicate the time to do them is when business is slow. Of course, when business is slow, we really can't afford the expense. We have chosen to make the investment in these meetings in the hope that you will find the information presented valuable to you in both the performance of your daily job and in the development of your knowledge and skills as a Hotworker. If you have ideas for topics in future meetings or in other ways to help us improve as an organization, please pass them on to me.

During the Tech meeting, we had an incident in the US with an 80 GPH electric propane vaporizer. First a regulator failed and then the vaporizer shutdown and would not restart. After 8 hours of only getting enough vapor to fire our burner on pilot, the vaporizer suddenly came to life and worked properly to complete the project. There was a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding about what happened and how this device actually operates. It has taken several weeks but I believe we are finally getting an understanding of what went on. The root cause of the problem was a slew of rust, metal flakes and dirt from the bottom of the propane supply tank. It fouled the regulator, polluted the seat of the solenoid valve and it also affected the high level float sensor in the vaporizer tank. We will make some procedure and equipment changes to prevent a reoccurrence of this type of event. We also need to do more teaching on how the unit is supposed to work – possibly we can use the video section of the website to accomplish this.

Just recently we completed a post weld heat treat (PWHT) job on a large vessel in Canada.

Shane, Ryan, Ramon and Paul did the job and by all accounts it was quite successful. Most of the work we do is refractory dryout and heatup. PWHT jobs are a little different since we are supplying the heat to modify the metallurgy of the vessel. There are specifications that must be achieved on the metal contact thermocouples – the gas stream control thermocouples that we are used to monitoring in refractory work are really just "for reference" in PWHT. My impression (and I'm a newbie) is that PWHT work is different but not rocket science. The main issue is that failure to achieve specs can result in a ruined vessel. If you are not familiar with PWHT work, you should try to learn about it from Shane, Danny and others who have knowledge of the specs and procedures. I know that I will be trying to understand it in more detail.

Let's hope for some improved business levels in the coming months.

Tom