

**SYSTEMATIC INVESTIGATION OF FAILURE ANALYSIS ON A STEAM  
TRAP BYPASS TUBE IN A COALFIRED POWER PLANT**

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## ABSTRACT

A steam trap bypass tube in a power plant was totally fractured. The aim of this study is to examine the evidence presented by the steam trap bypass tube failure, determining the failure mechanism, determining the root cause of the failure and to recommend appropriate corrective actions. The power plant is a coal fired power plant with its normal operation temperature of 540°C. This study consists of failure mode inventory collection of the steam trap bypass tube failure, collection of background information about the process, component function and operating conditions. Detailed investigation carried out by visual examination, nondestructive testing (NDT), metallurgical testing which consists of microstructure examination, chemical testing and mechanical testing. Optical Microscopy (OM), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) combined with Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDS), Glow Discharge Spectrometer (GDS) and Energy Dispersive X-ray Diffraction (XRD) experiments were used throughout the investigation on the sample obtained. From the evidence with considering the contribution factors such as temperature, pressure and environment, a fault analysis was made and it can be concluded that the cause of failure to the steam trap bypass is due to multi causes which consists of creep failure and hydrogen damage. The root cause of high temperature creep and hydrogen damage which occurred at the steam trap bypass tube is due to material properties that are inadequate for the actual operating conditions of a steam trap bypass tube which is not according to the specification. The material must be actually ASTM SA-335-P22 (2.25Cr-1Mo) with 490MPa minimum tensile strength and 320MPa minimum yield strength. However from the investigation found that the material used was ASTM SA-192 (low strength carbon steel) with 324MPa minimum tensile strength and 180MPa minimum yield strength.

## ABSTRAK

Sebatang paip perangkap stim pada sebuah stesen janakuasa didapati telah musnah sepenuhnya. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji kesan yang diperlihatkan dari paip yang pecah, mengetahui mekanisma kegagalan, mengetahui punca utama kegagalan serta memberi cadangan kaedah supaya kegagalan tidak akan berulang pada masa hadapan. Stesen janakuasa tersebut adalah dari jenis stesen janakuasa yang menggunakan arang batu sebagai bahan bakar dan beroperasi pada suhu 540°C. Kajian ini terdiri daripada penemuan mode kegagalan, pengumpulan maklumat latar belakang proses, fungsi komponen serta keadaan beroperasi. Kajian dilakukan dengan melakukan pemerhatian secara visual, ujian tanpa musnah (NDT), ujian metalurgi yang terdiri daripada pemerhatian mikrostruktur, ujian kimia serta ujian mekanikal. Optical Microscopy (OM), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) gabungan Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDS), Glow Discharge Spectrometer (GDS) dan Energy Dispersive X-ray Diffraction (XRD) eksperimen telah digunakan sepanjang melakukan kajian pada sample yang diperolehi. Hasil dari penemuan dengan mengambil kira faktor-faktor seperti suhu, tekanan serta keadaan sekeliling, satu analisis punca kegagalan dilakukan dimana punca kegagalan adalah disebabkan dwi punca yang terdiri daripada rayapan bersuhu tinggi serta kemusnahan hydrogen. Punca utama kegagalan pada pipe perangkap stim ini adalah disebabkan sifat bahan yang digunakan adalah tidak bersesuaian dengan keadaan operasi dimana bahan pipe yang digunakan tidak mengikut spesifikasi. Bahan yang digunakan pada pipe perangkap stim yang musnah haruslah ASTM SA-335-P22 (2.25Cr-1Mo) dengan 490MPa kekuatan tegangan minimum dan 320MPa kekuatan alah minimum. Namun demikian setelah penyelidikan, bahan pada pipe perangkap stim yang digunakan adalah ASTM SA-192 (keluli karbon rendah) dengan 324MPa kekuatan tegangan minimum dan 180MPa kekuatan alah minimum.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	TOPIC	PAGE
	TITLE	i
	DECLARATION	ii
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
	ABSTRACT	iv
	ABSTRAK	v
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
	LIST OF TABLES	ix
	LIST OF FIGURES	x
	LIST OF SYMBOLS	xiv
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
	LIST OF APPENDIX	xvi
1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
	1.1 Statement of Problem	2
	1.2 Objective of Study	3
	1.3 Scope of Study	3
11	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	5
	2.1 Steam Trap Function and Operation	9
	2.1.1 Steam Trap Bypass	11
	2.1.2 Condensate Formation in Steam Trap Bypass Tube	13
	2.2 Material Damage and Mechanisms	13
	2.2.1 Alloy Steel	18

2.3	Failure Mode Inventory	21
2.3.1	Hydrogen Damage Failures	21
2.3.1.1	Classification of Hydrogen Processes	22
2.3.1.2	Hydrogen Damage Theories	25
2.3.1.3	Hydrogen Damage Characterization	30
2.3.2	Corrosion Failures	36
2.3.2.1	Uniform Corrosion	37
2.3.2.2	Pitting Corrosion	37
2.3.2.3	Crevice Corrosion	38
2.3.2.4	Galvanic Corrosion	39
2.3.2.5	Stress Corrosion Cracking	39
2.3.3	Erosion Failures	41
2.3.4	Liquid Metal Embrittlement Failures	42
2.3.5	Creep Failures	43
2.4	Characterization Summary of Failure Modes	52
<b>III</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	54
3.1	Collection of Background Information	58
3.2	Visual Examination	59
3.3	Nondestructive Testing	59
3.4	Cutting the Samples	60
3.5	Mounting specimen	61
3.6	Grinding	62
3.7	Polishing	63
3.8	Etching	64
3.8.1	Micro Etching	65
3.8.2	Macro Etching	65
3.9	Optical Microscopy (OM) Examinations	66
3.10	Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) Examinations	67
3.11	Energy Dispersive X-ray Diffraction (XRD)	68
3.12	Chemical analysis	69
<b>IV</b>	<b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b>	71
4.1	Visual Examination	72

4.2	Nondestructive Testing	74
4.3	Metallurgical Testing	75
4.3.1	Microstructure Examination	76
4.3.2	Chemical Testing	86
4.3.3	Mechanical Testing	99
4.4	Fault Analysis	104
<b>V</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>107</b>
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>110</b>
	<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>114</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>122</b>



## LIST OF TABLES

NO	TITLE	PAGE
2.1	ASTM specifications for steels commonly used in refinery and petrochemical equipments	15
2.2	Materials used in boiler construction	16
2.3	Maximum tube-metal temperature permitted by ASME code and boiler manufacturers	17
2.4	Initial Creep Temperature	51
2.5	Summary of Steam Trap Bypass Tube Failure Modes	53
3.1	ASTM Standards Used in Metallurgical Testing	57
4.1	Mechanical and operating data of tube	72
4.2	Result of bulk chemical composition test	86
4.3	Chemical specification (%) for ASTM SA-335-P22 and ASTM SA-192 compared to bulk chemical composition result of the failed tube	87
4.4	Hardness test results done at cross section of tube	100
4.5	Ultimate tensile strength ( $\sigma_{UTS}$ ) and yield strength ( $\sigma_y$ ) of tube converted from the hardness value obtained	103
4.6	Fault analysis of a steam trap bypass tube failure	106



## LIST OF FIGURES

NO	TITLE	PAGE
1.1	Insulated steam trap bypass tube in actual process	2
1.2	Fractured steam trap bypass tube	3
2.1	(a) Inter-granular cracks and presence of numerous creep cavities at grain boundary (b) Inter-granular nature of propagation with many small parallel cracks	6
2.2	(a) Progressive nature of fracture (b) Crack is associated with carburizing more at outer surface	7
2.3	(a) Effect of general corrosion and flow pattern (b) Uniform dissolution at ID	8
2.4	Typical Power Plant Layout	10
2.5	Inverted bucket trap with a parallel air vent	12
2.6	Mechanism of hydrogen embrittlement	25
2.7	Solubility of Hydrogen in Iron as a function of temperature and of pressure	26
2.8	Effect of Hydrogen Pressure, on the U.T.S of 3% Cr-Mo Steel: (1) 41.5, (2) 53, (3) 67, and (4) 98 tons/sq.in.	27
2.9	Schematic of possible reaction steps involved in the embrittlement of a structural alloy by external molecular hydrogen environment	29
2.10	Schematic view of destinations for hydrogen in a metal microstructure: (a) solid solution; (b) solute-hydrogen pair; (c) dislocation atmosphere; (d) grain boundary accumulation; (e) particle-matrix interface accumulation; (f) void containing recombined hydrogen	29
2.11	Microcracking in hydrogen-charged specimens of X60 steel	30

2.12	Transition between brittle and ductile fracture	31
2.13	(a) Fracture surface observed in a specimen that fractured by brittle mode. (b) Large longitudinally oriented cracks	32
2.14	Fracture Surfaces of Corrosion-induced Hydrogen Embrittlement in Aluminium Alloy 2024	32
2.15	Fish eyes on the fracture surface	33
2.16	Cleavage fracture of the aureole of a fish eye region	34
2.17	Opened bubble on a galvanized steel surface	34
2.18	Partially intercrystalline fracture with ductile marks on the grain faces	35
2.19	Decarburized 1060 steel heated at 1205°C at 100X magnification	36
2.20	Typical undermining form of pitting in the microstructure of an aluminium alloy wrought product (100X)	38
2.21	Cross section of stress corrosion crack in stainless steel (500X)	40
2.22	Impingement failure of elbow in steam condensate line	41
2.23	Erosion corrosion of slide valve at 900°C in petroleum refinery	42
2.24	Schematic creep curve	44
2.25	Microstructural and fractographic features of creep fracture mechanism	46
2.26	Fractography showing extensive plastic deformation due to fracture at high temperature	46
2.27	Schematic illustration of formation of (a) wedge and (b) creep cavities	47
2.28	Microstructures from creep specimens showing creep cavities and wedge cracks (a) Cracks initiated at triple boundaries (b) Beadlike cracks along grain boundaries	47
2.29	Fracture mechanism map for pure iron	48
2.30	Fracture mechanism map for a 2.25 Cr1Mo steel containing 0.13wt%C	49
3.1	Sequence of failure investigation	55
3.2	Sequence of metallography investigation	56
3.3	The position of samples	58
3.4	Illustration of sample taken	60
3.5	Picture of wire cut Electrodischarge Machining (EDM)	61
3.6	(a) Picture of standard mounting machine (b) Close up picture of sample placement for mounting procedure	62

3.7	Picture of mounted sample	62
3.8	Picture of standard grinding machine	63
3.9	Picture of standard polisher machine	64
3.10	Sample macro etched in hot 10% nital for 20 minutes	66
3.11	Picture of Optical Microscope (OM)	67
3.12	Picture of Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM)	68
3.13	Picture of Energy Dispersive X-ray Diffraction (XRD)	69
4.1	Sample at fracture surface showed brittle appearance	72
4.2	Fishmouth appearance that fractured apart due to high pressure	73
4.3	Longitudinal cracks in inside tube surface with the presence of oxide scale	73
4.4	Longitudinal cracks grow and initiate the tube fracture	74
4.5	Red dye penetration examination at (a) outside tube surface and (b) inside tube surface showing cracks	75
4.6	Inside tube surface shows similar crack distance (0.9 mm) between the longitudinal cracks (5X)	77
4.7	OM micrograph of cross section inside tube edge shows 0.35 mm thickness of oxide scale in inside tube surface (20X)	78
4.8	(a) Cross section of sample macro-etched with hot 10% nital shows light area at inside tube. (b) Failure mode inventory: Decarburized 1060 steel heated at 1205°C at 100X magnification	79
4.9	Microstructure examination with 20X magnification using optical microscope, (a) cross section of inside tube edge (b) cross section of outside tube edge (c) inside tube surface (d) outside tube surface.	80
4.10	OM micrograph at cross section of inside tube showing the grain size differences between the grains near and far from the inside tube edge.	81
4.11	Illustration of how a refinement in grain size improves resistance to hydrogen failure as measured by the time to failure of two strengths of AISI 4340 steels	83
4.12	SEM micrograph at the cross section of inside tube edge and outside tube edge shows graphitized microstructure, microvoids, pores and intergranular cracks	84
4.13	OM micrograph at cross section of inside tube edge shows voids and grooves (small cusps) in v-shaped	84

4.14	SEM micrograph of fracture surface with 20X magnification	85
4.15	SEM micrograph with higher magnification (500X) shows dimples, brittle facets, cleavage fracture and hair line cracks	85
4.16	EDS analysis to reveal decarburization at the (a) cross section of inside tube edge sample in the circle area (250X), (b) along the grain boundaries (2200X)	88
4.17	Graph of chemical composition along the grain boundaries at point 001	88
4.18	Graph of chemical composition along the grain boundaries at point 002	89
4.19	Graph of chemical composition along the grain boundaries at point 003	89
4.20	EDS analysis to reveal decarburization done linearly at different grains at cross section of inside tube edge sample (2200X)	89
4.21	Graph of chemical composition linearly at different grains at point 001	90
4.22	Graph of chemical composition linearly at different grains at point 002	90
4.23	Graph of chemical composition linearly at different grains at point 003	90
4.24	Graph of chemical composition linearly at different grains at point 004	91
4.25	Graphs of element percentage at points along the grain boundaries of cross section inside tube edge sample	91
4.26	Graphs of element percentage at points linearly at different grains of cross section inside tube edge sample	92
4.27	Mapping image at cross section of inside tube edge	94
4.28	Mapping image at cross section of outside tube edge	95
4.29	Pattern diffraction of the internal tube	97
4.30	Pattern diffraction of the outer tube	98
4.31	Hardness test points carried out at cross section of tube	99
4.32	Long cylindrical tube with an external radial edge crack extending from the boundary subjected to a uniform internal pressure. $K_I$ is for the edge crack	102
4.33	Mechanical properties graph of failed sample	104
4.34	Types of failures that tend to be the cause of steam trap bypass tube failure	105

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

$^{\circ}\text{C}$	-	Degrees Celcius
$^{\circ}\text{F}$	-	Degrees Farenheit
%	-	Percentage
$D_c$	-	Grains cut by the circumference
$D_i$	-	Grains in area
M	-	Magnification
$N_A$	-	Number of grains per unit area
$N_V$	-	Number of grains contained in unit volume
HV	-	Vickers Hardness
$\sigma_y$	-	Yield strength
c	-	Constant
$\sigma_{UTS}$	-	Ultimate Tensile Strength
e	-	Elongation
$\sigma$	-	Stress

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

SEM	-	Scanning Electron Microscopy
OM	-	Optical Microscope
EDS	-	Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy
GDS	-	Glow Discharge Spectrometer
XRD	-	Energy Dispersive X-ray Diffraction
EDM	-	Electrodischarge Machining
NDT	-	Non Destructive Testing
OD	-	Outside Diameter
ID	-	Inside Diameter
ASTM	-	American Society for Testing Materials
UTS	-	Ultimate Tensile Strength



PTTA UTHM  
PERPUSTAKAAN TUN AMINAH

**LIST OF APPENDIX**

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
A	Microstructure Examination Pictures	114
B	Chemical Analysis Data Result	122



**PTTA UTHM**  
PERPUSTAKAAN TUNKU TUN AMINAH

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a power plant industry, failures usually occur on tubes and pipelines. Establishing the causes of failures provides information of improvements in design, operating procedures and the use of components. Failure analysis is an engineering approach to determine how and why an equipment or component has failed. Failure occurs when it does not meet its requirements. Failure analysis can also be defined as an investigation to determine the underlying reasons for the nonconformance to system requirements and is performed to identify nonconformance root causes and to recommend appropriate corrective actions [1].

A failure investigation and subsequence analysis should determine the primary cause of a failure, and based on the determination, corrective action should be initiated that will prevent similar failures. Although the sequence is subject to variation, depending upon the nature of a specific failure, the principal stages that comprise the investigation and analysis of failure is firstly the collection of background data and selection of samples [2]. Preliminary examination of the failed part which includes visual examination and record keeping will be the next stage of investigation. Nondestructive testing and mechanical testing that includes hardness test can also be done as part of the investigation. The next stage is the selection, identification, preservation or cleaning of all specimens. Macroscopic examination and analysis is the next stage where fracture surface, secondary cracks and other surface phenomena will be identified. After the macroscopic examination, microscopic examination and analysis is the next stage. Selection and



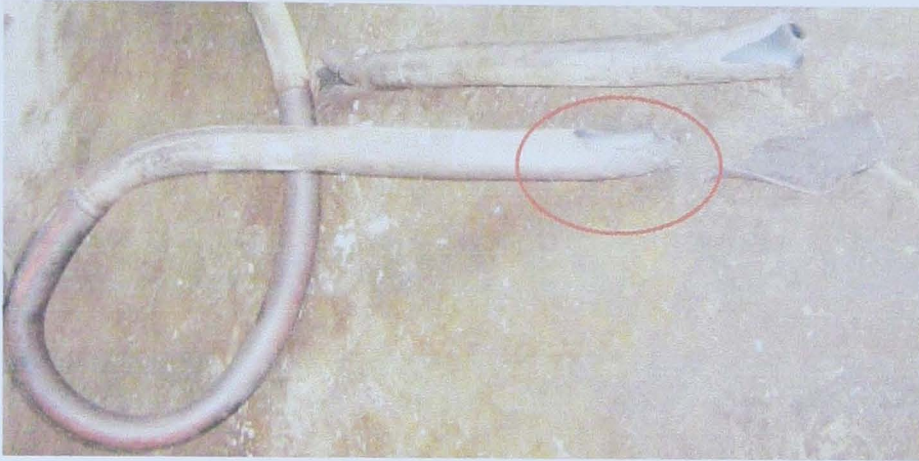
preparation of metallographic sections will need to be done thus the examination and analysis of metallographic sections. From the examinations, failure mechanism will be determined. For further investigation, chemical analysis which includes determining the bulk, local, surface corrosion products, deposit or coatings will be done. From the results, analysis of fracture mechanics will then be determined. Testing under simulated service conditions can be done for further analysis. The final stage is the analysis of all the evidence, formulation of conclusion and writing the report [2].

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

Cut-off a failed steam trap bypass tube of a coal-fired power plant was received. The tube is said to be made of a TU10CD9-10 (tube specification) which corresponds to ASTM SA335 P22. The outside diameter (OD) of the tube is 63.5 mm and the inside tube diameter (ID) is 53.34 mm. The received steam trap bypass tube was completely fractured and this study is to identify the root causes and to recommend appropriate corrective actions due to the failure. Figure 1.1 shows the insulated steam trap bypass tube in actual process and figure 1.2 shows the pieces of fractured steam trap bypass tube.



**Figure 1.1:** Insulated steam trap bypass tube in actual process.



**Figure 1.2:** Fractured steam trap bypass tube (in circle indicates picture of sample received).

## 1.2 Objective of Study

There are three primary objectives in this study, the first objective is to examine the evidence presented by the steam trap bypass tube failure and determining the failure mechanism. The second objective is to determine the root cause of the failure. The third objective is to recommend appropriate corrective actions to overcome the problem.

## 1.3 Scope of Study

The study involves collection of failure mode inventory of the steam trap bypass tube failure. This study also involves collection of background information about the process, component function, operating conditions and failure event sequence. Detailed investigation carried out by Non Destructive Testing (NDT), microstructure examination using Optical Microscopy (OM), Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) combined with Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy (EDS), Glow Discharge Spectrometer (GDS) and

Energy Dispersive X-ray Diffraction (XRD) testing on the sample will be done. From these results, analysis of the result will be done to determine the root cause of the steam trap bypass tube failure.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

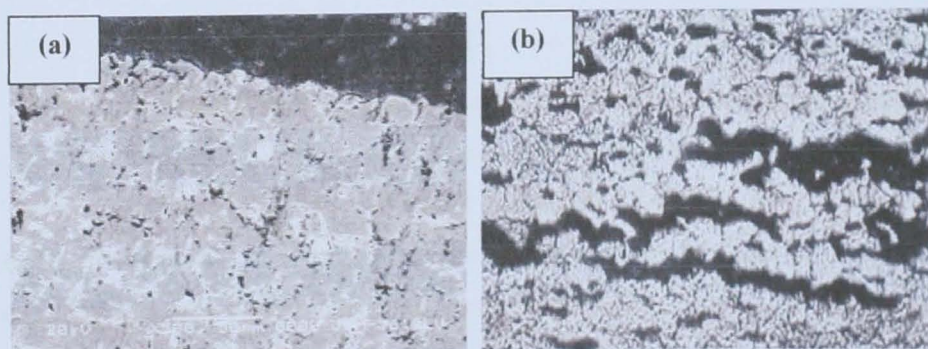
Fracture and failure is a natural and frequent phenomenon, the consequences of which are both positive and negative. Fracture mechanics has gained a primary role in the analysis of the mechanical behavior of materials. The fundamental aspect of elasticity and plasticity being already clarified, the research cutting edge is focusing on the several damage phenomena either smeared or discrete occurring with a decrease of the loading capacity when the structural deformation increases [24]. These loading stage represents the pre-collapse condition and is investigated today both experimentally and numerically. During such an unstable and final process, the elementary failure mechanisms may interact such as brittle fracture propagation, plastic deformation, fatigue, creep and instability of the equilibrium.

Any attempt to describe and to investigate the transient period of the failure process, according to the actual sequence of the critical events is therefore extremely a significant. As long as failures of industrial components are approached and investigated in a systematic and consistent manner, it will be able to go back to the true causes and thus prevent similar recurrence.

Since long time ago, failure investigations and analysis of case studies had been done at different types of areas, components and different operational background such as on weldment parts, pressure components, process engineering and petrochemical

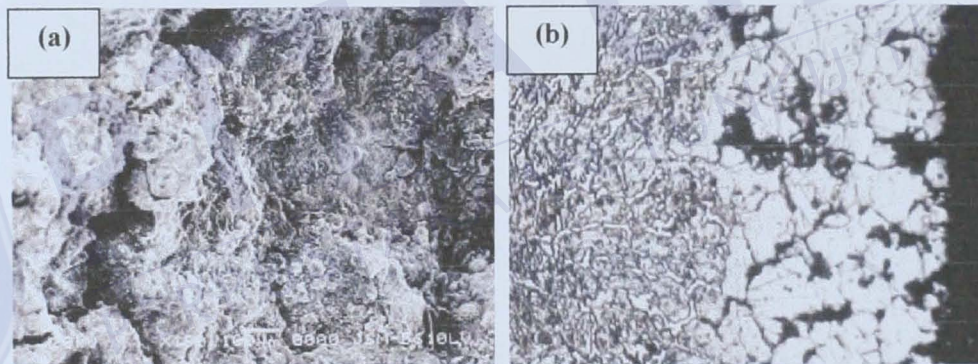
components, machinery and mechanical components, power engines, chemical and food plant, civil and transportation and also on steam units according to the failure occurred.

From previous failure investigations done by many researchers and investigators, the failure investigation on a steam trap bypass tube has not been done and reported. Since then, failure modes of previous failure investigations on different parts which are similar to the steam trap bypass tube background information which includes the working medium, temperature, pressure and type of material were studied. One of the examples of previous failure investigations done by researchers and investigators used as failure modes is failure on a primary superheater [25]. The service life of tube is 7 years before failure. The steam temperature & pressure of tube are and  $450^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $140\text{ kg/cm}^2$  respectively. The tube has OD 63.5 mm and ID 5.5 mm. The tubes are located horizontally with flue gas passes vertically. Upon SEM examination conducted as in figure 2.1 (a), it revealed presence of inter-granular cracks and presence of numerous creep cavities at grain boundary. Presence of micro-cracks are observed more towards outer surface and near by crack region. Severity of cracks and cavity reduces when we move away from the main crack. From microstructure examination as shown in figure 2.1(b), the crack displayed inter-granular nature of propagation with many small parallel cracks adjacent to main crack is observed. This magnification was done using a Leco Image Analyzer at 300X. In present case the failure of tube seems to have occurred due to long term over-heating, above allowable design temperature, could be due to higher velocity of flue gas at this region or impingement of flue gases on tube surface facing flue gas or improper steam flow.



**Figure 2.1:** (a) Inter-granular cracks and presence of numerous creep cavities at grain boundary (b) Inter-granular nature of propagation with many small parallel cracks.

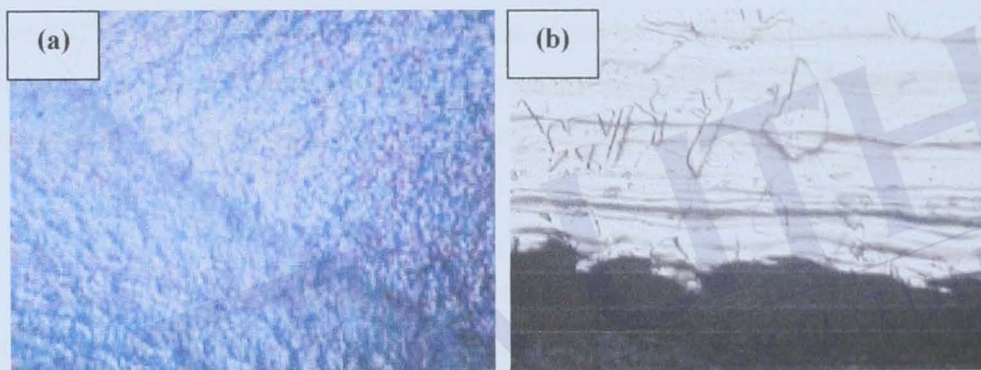
Failure investigation was also done on a furnace tube failure [25]. The failure occurred in a bottom fired furnace tube with experienced service of 14 months against the normal life of 6 to 7 years. The tube is 25 Cr/35 Ni. The average tube metal temperature remains between 1000°C to 1100°C temperatures. As per the manufacturer data, these tubes are designed for 1150°C. The pressure inside the tube is 1 kg/cm<sup>2</sup>. SEM analysis conducted revealed a progressive nature of fracture especially towards OD side shown in figure 2.2 (a). However, majority evidences on fracture surface were masked under heavy scaling, which is generally expected under such service. From microstructure examination (figure 2.2 (b)), the crack is associated with carburizing more so at outer surface with decreasing the depth of carburizing towards ID which is another important evidence of crack originating from outer diameter and progressing towards ID. This magnification was done using a Leco Image Analyser at 300X. In present case the failure of tube has occurred due to localized overheating, which reduced ductility and failed under operational vibrations.



**Figure 2.2:** (a) Progressive nature of fracture (b) Crack is associated with carburizing more at outer surface.

Another example of failure investigation done is failure investigation on a sulfuric and concentration plant piping [25]. In a sulfuric acid concentration plant, as a part of process, condensate is chilled in a heat exchanger. The line, which is connected from heat exchanger (E08-3) to vacuum pump, one elbow was reported to have leaked and needed replacement. Severe corrosion was reported inside the replaced pipeline within 10 days of operation. The extent of corrosion was so severe that entire replaced pipeline reduced to paper thickness with punctures. The pipeline is operating with 1 to

2% H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, 0.5% HNO<sub>2</sub> and 0.6 to 1.0 % HNO<sub>3</sub> at 10 to 20°C temperatures. Low magnification examination was done by the failure Analysis and Investigation team to find out the corrosion characteristics. Internal surface of pipe, weld and elbow showed severe corrosion on pipe. The close-up view of corroded surface inside the pipe showed effect of general corrosion and flow pattern (figure 2.3 (a)). Leakages observed in the form of openings between weld and pipe. From microstructure examination, uniform dissolution at ID is observed under microstructure examination at a magnification of 300X as shown in figure 2.3 (b). The fluctuation in nitric acid concentration did not allow stabilizing passivity on newly fabricated pipeline resulted into severe corrosion.



**Figure 2.3:** (a) Effect of general corrosion and flow pattern  
(b) Uniform dissolution at ID.

In this study, it consists of systematic investigation of failure analysis on a steam trap bypass tube. Since failure investigations has not been done on a steam trap bypass tube, this study is important to produce information on steam trap bypass failure modes, information and also the failure mechanisms that may occur on a steam trap bypass tube. These results will be able to give failure experience information's and thus to prevent similar recurrence on a steam trap bypass tube.

## 2.1 Steam Trap Function and Operation

In most plants, steam is produced in a power plant with a boiler. This allows the majority of heat energy to be produced in a central location. The steam is then piped throughout the facility via steam lines to locations where heat energy is needed. In many cities, steam may be purchased from local utilities. Regardless of the source, steam is expensive and preventable losses are unacceptable.

Steam is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas which forms when water is heated above 212°F (100°C). In a pressurized system, steam is capable of storing and transporting large quantities of energy. Once steam has formed, more energy can be introduced by further heating. This causes both its temperature and pressure to rise.

Once steam leaves the boiler, it begins to lose energy and cool. As its temperature falls, the steam condenses back into water. Failure to remove condensate from the steam system sets up a vicious cycle [3]. From the typical normal power plant layout by P.K Nag as shown in figure 2.4, the steam pressure that enters high pressure heaters is at 50 bar and 10 bar. The steam pressure that enters low pressure heaters is at 3 bar and 1.5 bar. Steam traps are normally situated after the heaters to remove the condensate from the steam. Referring to the highest pressure entering a heater with 50 bar, the temperature of steam is in the range of 520°C-530°C. For this case failure analysis case study, since the actual pressure and temperature was not obtained, it is assumed with the maximum values of pressure and temperature. The steam trap is situated at the highest pressure 50 bar and temperature in the range of 520°C-530°C.



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