

Gas station owners face \$412,900 fine

The former owners of Tahoe Tom's gas station in South Lake Tahoe were fined \$412,900 this month by the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board for failing to cleanup the site.

The board said Mohammad Ahmad and the Thomas E. Erickson Trust did not comply with a Cleanup and Abatement Order (CAO) to define the extent of petroleum hydrocarbon releases and to clean up unauthorized releases of petroleum hydrocarbons from underground storage tanks, which have impacted groundwater.

Lahontan, in a statement, said it believes the \$412,900 liability should provide a deterrent to others who may consider violating Water Board enforcement orders.

The releases were first identified in early 2007 at the Tahoe Tom's Gas Station at 4029 Lake Tahoe Blvd. in South Lake Tahoe. Testing found leaks in three fill and turbine sumps and in all four dispenser nozzles.

Ahmad was operating the business at the time of the releases, and the Thomas E. Erickson Trust owned the property.

Clean up and abatement was needed to contain plume migration in groundwater to prevent pollution of nearby domestic and municipal wells.

In the ACL complaint, Water Board staff alleged that the two parties failed to comply with one CAO directive and complied late with six investigation and reporting directives.

At an Oct. 14 public hearing, the Water Board heard testimony from Water Board staff and Erickson about the allegations. Ahmad did not attend the meeting or submit evidence for consideration.

After learning clean up and abatement was stopped at the site for 257 days in 2008, and that gasoline was detected in a nearby motel well, the Water Board increased the fine amount above the recommended \$248,400 to \$412,900.

The gas station is no longer owned and operated by the Erickson Trust and Ahmad. However, the parties have since come into compliance with Water Board orders for cleanup at the site. Cleanup actions are reducing petroleum hydrocarbons in groundwater and, thereby, reducing the threat to nearby wells.