

Electrical arc at South Tahoe Ross injures 1, cuts power

By Kathryn Reed

An electrical snafu that could be heard outside the Ross Dress for Less store sent one employee to the hospital, knocked out power for more than three hours to the South Lake Tahoe shopping center, and had fire and building inspectors puzzled.

“There’s a lot of voltage in that panel. There’s a lot of safety measures. There are grounders and breaking devices that should have prevented this,” said Dave Walker, South Lake Tahoe building official.



Fire crews keep people from the South Lake Tahoe Ross store June 7 because of an electrical problem.

Photo/Kathryn Reed

He was in front of the store hours after the 3pm explosion waiting for NV Energy crews to arrive. Power was restored to the center at 6:30pm, with Denny’s on the corner of Highway 50

and Al Tahoe Boulevard the last business to get power.

(Rite-Aid has generators to keep the lights on.)

Fire Marshal Ray Zachau said he did the initial inspection on the store before it opened in March 2007. A fire inspection is then required every year. The panel was the same one used by Albertson's, the previous tenant.

Neither Zachau nor Walker would venture a guess why so much energy was emitting from the electrical box. A metal shelf being carried by an employee came in contact with the box, which caused an electrical arc. Under normal conditions that contact should not have done anything.

"I'm really surprised we didn't have a fatality today," Zachau said.

The long-time employee's name was not being released Monday. The store manager, who did not give her name, referred questions to corporate. They have not responded to *Lake Tahoe News'* inquiries.

The manager believes the employee, who was conscious when taken to Barton Memorial Hospital with flash burns, would not have to stay overnight.

Zachau said there was a lot of damage to the electrical system in the store. The arc was so powerful it dimmed the lights across the street at the police department.

No one at the store was answering the phone at 7pm. It's not known when the store will reopen.

Denny's missed the late afternoon crowd, but was able to serve dinner.

"Another half hour and we might have been in trouble," Assistant Manager Heather LaCroix said. But a few hours being closed unexpectedly sure beat the incident in 2009 when a gas

explosion at the restaurant had it shuttered for several months and sent several people to the hospital.