

Smoker leads to evacuation at 968 Park Hotel

By Kathryn Reed

Saturday afternoon's rain showers contributed to 968 Park Hotel near Stateline being evacuated that night.

Hotel staff had put cushions and other pool items under a concrete stairwell when the rain started. The thinking was that most summer storms in Lake Tahoe blow through fast and that they would retrieve the items fairly quickly and put them back where they belong.



Remnants of the smoldering items at 968 Park Hotel on July 24. Photos/Kathryn Reed

But what happened is the flammable items were left there.

Being a non-smoking facility means guests of the 58-room South Lake Tahoe hotel have to go outside to light up. One of them either dropped a cigarette, ashes or match down the stairwell to cause the combustible materials to smolder, according to officials.

That distinct smell of something having been on fire and then doused with water lingered in the back parking lot where the cushions laid.

“It all adds up to something very unsuspecting,” said Sgt. Brian Williams of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department. “They had an excellent response to the emergency and the facility evacuated very well.”

The hotel sign out front said “full house.” Wayne and Joan Brown of Naples, Fla., were on the other side of the street with many of the other guests watching the four-engine response by the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department, along police and ambulance personnel.

Wayne Brown said smoke could be smelled on two of the three floors. Joan Brown had to change fast from her nightgown into something more presentable for standing on a street.

No one appeared to be scared. This could have been because no flames were ever seen.

The manager on duty wanted nothing to do with the media.

The call came in at 9:04pm. People were let back in about 40 minutes later.

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