

Heat tape on pine needles cause of S. Tahoe structure fire

By Kathryn Reed

Heat tape combined with brittle pine needles on a shake roof are being blamed for a fire at The Block hotel in South Lake Tahoe this afternoon.

South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe-Douglas firefighters arrived at the boarded up hotel near Stateline about 1pm Friday to find flames and smoke billowing from the back left corner of the roof.



Tahoe-Douglas
firefighter
Chris Peterson
works on the
Block fire on
Sept. 2.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

South Tahoe Fire Marshal Ray Zachau told *Lake Tahoe News* about one-fifth of the roof was damaged.

While little evidence of the fire could be seen an hour after the call, the smell of smoke lingered in the air.

Firefighters from both agencies were knocking out shingles Friday afternoon to make sure no embers were below the roof lining.

The Block has been in the news in recent months with Eneliko "Sean" Smith again ordered to pay the outstanding hotel tax on the property.

The Block and Cedar Lodge, both on Cedar Avenue, were once his. BMR Funding LLC in Pennsylvania owns The Block and First Credit Bank owns the Cedar Lodge in Los Angeles.

Zachau has been trying to reach both owners to discuss the possibility of allowing the city to use them as training tools. The idea would be to light them on fire to give firefighters practical experience as well as rid the area of blight.

"These things are a disaster waiting to happen," Fire/Police Chief Brian Uhler said standing in front of The Block. "They are a nuisance to the community. We have homeless people routinely here. They climb in behind the plywood."

He said with the command structure of the fire department changing as well as the few number of structure fires in the city it's important to get firefighters practical training in terms of being in charge of a multiple engine response and putting out a fire.



Heat tape started pine needles on

fire at The
Block.

As for the fire at The Block, the owners will be receiving a bill. For exactly how much has not been determined.

When Zachau was at the property late last year a sign was on the fence that the power was going to be turned off. Obviously it was turned back on. The city has the authority now to make sure Liberty Energy turns it off – primarily for safety reasons.