

Officials have handle on Zephyr Cove fuel leak

By Kathryn Reed

ZEPHYR COVE – A hum almost like a refrigerator emanates from the parking lot near Zephyr Cove Lodge and just before the pavement that leads to the cabins.

It's an air sparge unit, which pulls the fumes from the fuel spill area at the resort that then cycles through a charcoal filter.



A sparge unit near the underground tanks at Zephyr Cove Resort.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

To the left of it, if looking toward Highway 50, are three strips of concrete. Buried below are three tanks, each able to hold about 10,000 gallons of fuel.

“We are looking at pulling those tanks out of the ground in the next month,” Mike Gabor, U.S. Forest Service engineer, said at the site Nov. 9.

The Forest Service owns the land where the fuel leak was detected in late June. Aramark is the concessionaire and the entity responsible for cleaning up the mess. The Forest Service and Nevada Division of Environmental Protection are overseeing the cleanup.

Until no contaminated soil is detected, cleanup continues. Several holes or wells in about a half-acre area have been drilled in order to determine if the gasoline is spreading. They will continue to be drilled until evidence of the fuel is completely gone.



Looking toward the lodge from the lake, the round item at the bottom of the photo is where a hole was drilled, the concrete behind and to the left of the sign is an underground tank, and the fenced off area to the right is the sparge unit.

Weekly conference calls are made between the property owner, concessionaire, state and the firm hired to do the cleanup so everyone knows the status of the operation.

While unleaded gasoline is moving via the groundwater toward Lake Tahoe and in other directions at a trickle of a pace, the lake has never tested positive for contaminants, nor has the stream on the north side of the property.

“It was a very slow leak over a very long time,” is how Gabor described it.

The leak was noticed during maintenance – a fitting was not sealing properly. Those tanks have been in the ground since the 1980s.

Some time before the summer boating season Aramark will replace the tanks with above ground containers, which is more common at marinas.

“They will go somewhere in the parking lot,” Jamie Hodgson, Aramark district manager, said pointing north.

This will allow the resort to resume regular operations. This past season it did not have enough fuel to fill private boats; only its fleet of watercraft and the M.S. Dixie II.