

Busted pipe likely sank Sierra Rose; boat still in Tahoe Keys Marina

By Jaclyn O'Malley, Reno Gazette-Journal

The \$3.2 million, three-story luxury yacht that sank more than two weeks ago while chained to a dock at Tahoe Keys Marina remained in the water Wednesday, while workers continued attempts to remove it.

Sierra Rose owner, Michael Stewart, on Wednesday did not immediately return a call for comment. Officials have said a private contractor would be responsible for the yacht's removal from the lake.

Staff at the Tahoe Keys Marina Yacht Club, where the vessel sunk July 9, said Wednesday afternoon that it still was submerged in the water. The yacht is nearly 86 feet long with its own helicopter pad. It was still touching the bottom of the lake, employees said.

California water and environmental officials have been monitoring the yacht for fuel leaks or other contaminants. They have reported no issues found so far.

The use of a crane and pumping out thousands of gallons of water from the inside has only minimally lifted the yacht out of the water. Marina officials have said its sheer size and continual leaks have delayed a quick removal.

The yacht is believed to have sunk because of a "machinery and equipment failure," said Lt. Dave Stevenson of the South Lake Tahoe Police Department, which is investigating the incident as a vessel collision. He said a broken water pipe is likely the blame.

No damage estimate was available.

About 3am July 9, Stevenson said that the yacht owner and some guests had awakened after the boat began to shift after water began to flood the insides. He said the group had earlier believed there was a leak in a water pipe and shut it off.

But it didn't work, Stevenson said.

A final cause will be determined after the boat is reinspected following its removal from the lake, he said.

At the time of the sinking, the yacht was chained to the dock at the marina. During the sinking, the boat lifted up parts of the dock, damaging it, Stevenson said.

No injuries were reported.

The Sierra Rose was known as the largest, noncommercial boat on Lake Tahoe.