

Water line replacement to bring fire suppression capability to Lukins Brothers customers



Terry Havey with Penhall Co. cuts lines Sept. 6 on 12th Street. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A multimillion-dollar waterline project to bring Lukins Brothers Water Company customers fire protection started this week.

The 4-inch lines are being replaced with 12-inch lines.

Because the bank loan was secured later in the summer than anticipated, the first phase is being broken into two segments

to accommodate the limited time contractors may move dirt or asphalt in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The first 3,400 lineal feet will go in this year along 12th Street, Tahoe Island and almost to Big Pine. Another 2,600 lineal feet will be put in next summer along James Avenue and by Highway 89 and down West Way. This two-year first phase is \$2 million. This will give 40 percent of the 963 customers adequate fire protection.

Sixteen fire hydrants are also being installed.

Customers can expect to see a \$15 to \$25 surcharge on their bills starting in 2014. The CPUC guarantees the loan will be repaid via the 20-year surcharge.

Another change is that as the line goes in so will meters at the residences and commercial properties on those streets. State law says all customers must have meters by 2025.

“Customers will have more consistent water pressure,” Jennifer Lukins, who runs the company, told *Lake Tahoe News*. She said on peak days there are times when people don’t have full pressure.



Jennifer Lukins goes over the water line replacement plans.

When water districts first came about in Lake Tahoe and other places it was all about domestic use. Not fire protection.

The Angora Fire of 2007 helped Lukins get the attention of the California Public Utility Commission. As a private water company, it is the CPUC that oversees Lukins. The city manager of South Lake Tahoe at the time filed a complaint with the CPUC saying Lukins didn't have adequate capacity to handle a fire. That in turn allowed Lukins to begin planning the massive water line replacement.

The delay from 2008 planning to 2013 implementation has been money. While all phases of the project are not funded, the entire first phase is. In 2008, this was estimated to be a 20-year project. Starting five years later, Lukins won't venture a guess as to when all the work will be done.

Phase 2 is estimated to cost \$6.1 million. This would bring fire coverage to 75 percent of Lukins customers. This phase includes storage tanks and booster pumps.

If Phase 1 comes under budget, those dollars will go to Phase 2.

"Completion of Phase 1 opens up (funding) opportunities," Lukins said. "It opens the door to explore other opportunities."

With Tahoe Valley Elementary School now a customer of Lukins, it might mean a collaborative project with the school district. The school has two fire hydrants.

The possibility of a joint project with South Tahoe Public Utility District to put a tank on Gardner Mountain has been talked about.

The interties Lukins and STPUD have will remain. Those are in place in case the other needs an emergency supply of water. In Phase 3 another tie on Ruth Avenue is penciled in.

Local contractor Thomas Haen Co. hopes to have as few interruptions in water service as possible.

Lukins will be paying \$300,000 to repave the streets it tears up. The city a couple years ago put a law on the books making utility companies do more than a patch job after digging.