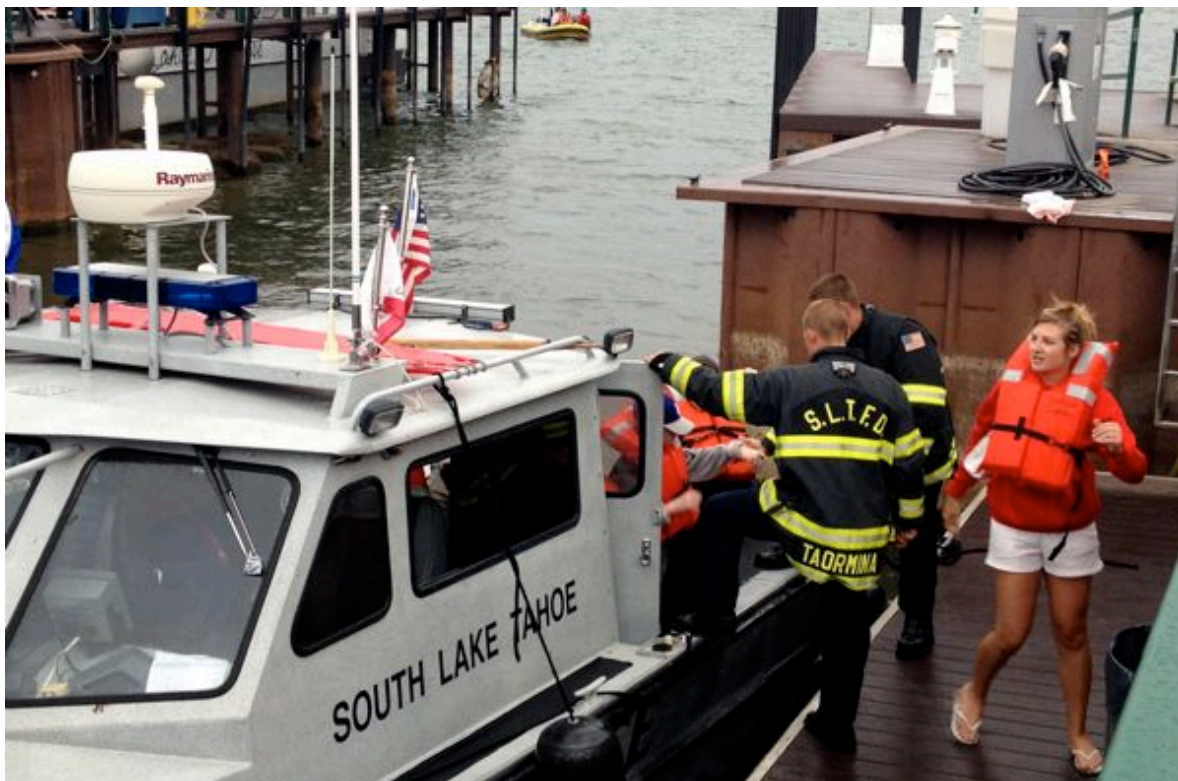


Tahoe Queen runs aground with 257 on board



Passengers get off a rescue boat at Ski Run Marina after the Tahoe Queen ran aground Aug. 4. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

About 300 people had to be shuttled from the Tahoe Queen to shore in rescue boats on Monday afternoon.

The paddle-wheeler was about 30 minutes into its 90-minute voyage Aug. 4 when it hit a sandbar off Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe. Fire officials estimated it to be about 600 yards from shore.

No injuries have been reported. There were 257 passengers on board and then the crew.

"It's premature to speculate how this happened," Dave Freirich, spokesman for Aramark, told *Lake Tahoe News*. Aramark

runs the Tahoe Queen out of Ski Run Marina in South Lake Tahoe.

A passenger told *Lake Tahoe News* that the captain said he should have been about 8 feet farther out to miss the sand. Lake Tahoe's water level is dropping every day as year-three of the drought continues.

Two boats tried to dislodge the Queen, but to no avail. One was the Paradise. It was able to take about 70 people back to the marina, but never went out again.



The Tahoe Queen is about 600 yards from Regan Beach.

Most people were ferried to shore by either El Dorado County sheriff's, South Lake Tahoe police or fire, U.S. Coast Guard, Vessel Assist or Tahoe Douglas fire boats. Many of them are small and can only take a half dozen people at a time.

However, police and fire officials were not notified about the grounding until people from the boat started calling 911 because they had been sitting on the sandbar for a couple hours, according to Fire Chief Jeff Meston.

"We didn't get any information," Carolyn O'Brien told *Lake Tahoe News*. The Lincoln woman was on the Queen for the first time with her husband and two sons.

All they were told is they were stuck. Then the Queen staff tried to give them a \$17 bill for sodas. They refused to pay it. No food or beverages were offered to passengers.

"We were on board for 3½ hours before anything really happened," Fred O'Callaghan said in terms of rescue boats arriving. The Cambridge, England, resident was on board with his wife and two kids.

The couple said most people on board were well behaved and that only a few seemed to be panicky.

One woman getting off at Ski Run screamed as she had to get out of the small boat. But a South Tahoe firefighter wrapped his arms around her to make sure she was safe and didn't fall into the water.

It had been a rough ride. The temperature was dropping, the wind blowing at about 15 mph, sprinkles falling and the white caps bouncing boats along.

Freirich, with the boat company, said the Queen would be staying the night off shore.

"I can't say for certain someone will be staying with the boat, but it will be monitored. It's grounded pretty good," Freirich said.

He didn't know if the boat will be inspected in the lake, towed to Ski Run once it's dislodged or if damages would be assessed at the marina.