

Lukins' wells contaminated, using STPUD water

By Kathryn Reed

Most of the water Lukins Brothers Water Company customers are using is coming from South Tahoe Public Utility District.

This is because two of the three active wells the South Lake Tahoe private water company operates are contaminated with Tetrachloroethylene, also known as PCE. The wells show 16 parts per billion and 43 parts per billion. The maximum contaminant level is 5 parts per billion.

The state Division of Drinking Water mandates regular testing of water for a variety of potential contaminants. The day it came back high the state was notified, the wells were shut down and the intertie with STPUD was opened. This was July 11. However, it was not until Sept. 30 that the state told Lukins to let its customers know what is going on. Legally, the water company could not disclose the information until being told to do so by the state.

Jen Lukins, who runs the water company, said there was no threat to customers because three months ago when the water came back with a high PCE reading the company took steps to ensure other water was coming out of taps.

"Everyone is receiving safe, potable drinking water that meets all drinking water standards," Lukins told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Those wells will be shut down until a treatment is found or Lukins drills a new well. An engineering firm is trying to determine what the best solution is for Lukins. Then we'll work with the state to get the funding."

Two private wells near the Y off Highway 89 are also contaminated with PCE.

“One challenge is we don’t have some obvious source,” Lauri Kemper with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Cleanup cannot take place until the location is identified. Once that is done the property owners will be tasked with cleaning it up.

Lahontan applied for a \$69,000 grant from the state’s cleanup and abatement account. Sometime this fall a series of hydropunches will be performed to determine the location of the contaminant. The drilling equipment punches holes in the soil, takes samples and tries to pinpoint where the PCE is originating.

Then the groundwater, soil or both will be treated.

Kemper said most likely this PCE outbreak is not from the Laundromat at the Y. There is still an open case involving that facility from when it had a self-serve dry cleaning machine that leaked in the 1970s. A similar machine was at the site of what is about to be BevMo, but that case was closed.

Kemper said the drought could be contributing to why PCE is making itself known because of how wells draw water.

“We hope we find the source of the contaminant fast before more of the aquifer becomes contaminated,” Lukins said.

In other water contamination news:

- Lahontan officials continue to monitor what Tahoe Tom’s gas station is doing regarding cleaning up MTBE leaking from its site into the ground water and contaminating the water at Mark Twain Hotel. The station is supposed to be paying for the bottled water being used by the South Lake Tahoe hotel, but it isn’t. Kemper said the station is racking up penalties. The water board will be meeting with station owners at the end of the month.