

SLT cracking down on storm drain pollution

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe businesses with contaminants at their businesses that could reach Lake Tahoe via a storm drain are soon going to face stricter scrutiny.

The city is developing a commercial stormwater program that will affect 188 businesses – 12 gas stations, 33 automotive related businesses, 141 restaurants and two industrial enterprises.

Jason Burke, the city's stormwater program manager, explained to the City Council earlier this week the reasons for the fee and how the inspections will work.

The council still needs to formally adopt the program. Before that happens, though, Burke and his colleagues want to schedule a meeting with businesses so most questions are answered before the council votes.

Part of the city's stormwater permit from the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board requires this oversight. Plus, in 2009 the city failed an audit by the EPA.

"They looked into the stormwater program and we were not proactively inspecting these businesses," Burke told *Lake Tahoe News*.



What goes in storm drains
ends up in Lake Tahoe.
Photo/LTN

The permit with Lahontan holds the city liable for anything that goes in its storm drains no matter how it got there or who put it there.

Burke said staff cutbacks and working on other issues regarding Lahontan's mandate to reduce pollutants getting into the lake took precedence which is why the new program is just now getting under way.

The change will have the city being proactive instead of reactive. Burke showed photos of examples of issues the city has dealt with – including an auto repair shop on Jan. 12 leaking brake fluid into a gutter that is 200 feet from a stream environmental zone, a restaurant waste leaking into a drain on Jan. 7, and a non-secure grease bin dumped and washed into a drain next to the Upper Truckee River on Aug. 7, 2014.

The new policy is designed to identify potential pollutant sources so the types of issues above are less likely to occur.

An inspector has been hired. The inspection fees are designed to cover the bulk of the program – about \$20,000. The city is not allowed to profit off the fee, only recover costs.

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Notes:

- Businesses that have questions may contact Jason Burke at 530.542.6038 or jburke@cityofslt.us.