

Queen safe at the dock, but unable to sail

By Kathryn Reed

Coast Guard officials spent Wednesday scouring the Tahoe Queen after a fire swept through it the day before.

It has been determined to be structurally sound and poses no threat to the public. However, it won't be leaving the dock anytime soon.

"They are making sure the vessel is sea worthy at the pier – that it is not going to sink or capsize," Coast Guard Lt. Lt. Jake Aulner told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The vessel is not sea worthy for getting under way or carrying passengers."

While the cause of the fire has not been determined, investigators said it started on the second level.

Painters and welders were working on renovating the boat when the fire broke out just after 8am Aug. 16. Aulner said the investigation will determine if the two types of contractors working in the same area sparked the blaze or if was something else.

The Coast Guard will also eventually put a dollar value on the loss.



The future of the Tahoe Queen is in limbo after the Aug. 16 fire. Photo/LTN

Ultimately it will be up to owner Aramark and insurance investigators to determine the future of the paddle-wheeler.

“We are cooperating with the U.S. Coast Guard as they investigate the cause of the fire. We are still in the process of determining extent of damage,” Karen Cutler, spokeswoman for Aramark, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

There appears to be no environmental damage from the blaze.

“There was some ash/burn debris on the water, but they did not

see any sign of fuel or oil spilled associated with the fire and all the fire retardant was contained," Tom Lotshaw with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency told *Lake Tahoe News*.

That was the same conclusion of the Coast Guard and the U.S. Forest Service.

At the time of the fire there were approximately 800 gallons of diesel fuel and 100 gallons of hydraulic oil onboard. None was lost during the blaze.

"No petroleum product reached the lake; any sheen on the surface of the water was from the Class A foam that Tahoe Douglas Fire Protection District used to put out the fire," Lisa Herron, spokeswoman for the Forest Service, told *Lake Tahoe News*. The USFS owns the land, with Aramark being the concessionaire.

The pier did not sustain any damage or scorching.

Aramark has a permit from the TRPA to operate one boat out of Zephyr Cove Marina, though more than one can be stored there. The Dixie operates there and the Queen was on site during renovations. It was only eight years ago that the Queen received a make-over to the tune of more than a half million dollars. She was originally launched the last week of June 1983. The first public cruise was Aug. 11, 1983.

The Queen used to be able to carry 500 passengers. That number dropped to 300 with the 2008 renovation in order to create a more relaxing, spacious setting.

Even though the Tahoe Queen has been at Zephyr Cove for more than a year, the lease with Ski Run Marina is still in effect – meaning they still have to pay that rent. That agreement, though, expires at the end of the year.

The Dixie resumed normal operations on Wednesday after two cruises were canceled Tuesday. It had been tied up near the

Queen when the fire started, but crews were able to take her out so she didn't catch fire.