

No fish killed from 4,700+ gallon chemical spill



The driver of the rig that overturned was working for Watson Brothers Trucking out of Manteca. Photo/CDFWS

By Kathryn Reed

It is estimated that at least 4,700 gallons of a toxic chemical reached the West Fork of the Carson River after a tractor trailer crashed May 9 near Woodfords.

“The thinking is a lot of it went into the water. They just don’t have any specific number,” Scott Ferguson with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control told *Lake Tahoe News*. Officials probably will never know the exact amount. Estimates are it could have been as much as 4,900 gallons.

The chemical was hypochlorite, a bleach-like substance. It had a concentration of 12.5 percent.

“The good news is so far there has not been any reports of any fish kill,” Ferguson said. “What is in the river is gone, meaning it has flowed on. There is nothing you can do once it

gets into the water in this situation.”

Some of the remaining concerns are impacts to aquatic life, with trout the main species in the river; and then if any rain were to soak the contaminated soil and carry it into a waterway or spread it farther on land.

H2O Environmental is handling the soil removal. That likely isn't going to start until Monday. Working with underground utilities is part of the delay in removing the soil. The site, which is near the Caltrans maintenance station in Woodfords, is being secured because of the incoming weather system.

Several agencies from California and Nevada are working together to resolve the contamination issue. They are in cleanup and assessment mode now, with any fines or recovery costs to be determined at a later date.

Lahontan, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, and California Fish and Wildlife Service were all at the site on Thursday taking samples. Alpine County and Caltrans are also involved.

Greg Brown, 46, of Oakland was driving east on Highway 88 west of Crystal Springs when he lost control, crossed into the westbound lane and overturned. According to the California Highway Patrol, the trailer detached and continued to overturn up the embankment on the north side of the highway. The tank ruptured and the chemical spewed on to the road, dirt and then into a tributary of the Carson River.

“Due to his speed through curves the driver lost control,” the CHP report says of the 10am Wednesday incident.

Brown's body was found in the cab of the truck hours later. The site had to be secured by hazmat crews before first responders were allowed in. It is not known if Brown died from the chemical release or the crash.