

No immediate solution to toxic plume in SLT

By Susan Wood

Water agencies are pressing forward on a proposed work plan designed to outline how to eliminate the contaminant PCE from groundwater near the Y in South Lake Tahoe.

Richard Solbrig, South Tahoe Public Utility District general manager, gave his board an update Sept. 21 on treatment of a toxic plume known for decades to leach into the groundwater in the highly industrial area at the Y. Officials have narrowed at least one scope of the plume to property owners and operators of the Lake Tahoe Laundry Works, which once existed at the shopping center anchored by Raley's. But the extent of the plume may not end there, and the plume could be co-mingled with others.



The circle represents the known area of the PCE plume in South Lake Tahoe.

Image/LRWQCB

Delineating that represents part of what the work plan is intended to do.

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board has put into place a conditional work plan to further investigate the magnitude of the situation in order to define where and when to fix the problem, and who's responsible. Responsible parties known so far, who were sent a letter by the regional water agency on Sept. 15, would be tagged to hire contractors to conduct the cleanup. First, water agencies need to figure out where the plume begins and ends.

"The plume is quite extensive," Solbrig told his board. "We may have more contamination. We have a lot at stake."

With at least a handful of wells known to have been contaminated in the Tahoe Keys and Lukins Brothers water districts that were shut down and capped off, STPUD has provided water from its system. However, the hope is STPUD's backup supply won't be too taxed.

All eyes from three water purveyors and the state are on those area wells – which all meet in one highly used zone drawing from the same aquifer.

The drought prompted California to regulate groundwater, ordering water jurisdictions to develop management plans. STPUD has taken the lead on the mandate and about a month ago, counted more than 600 private wells within its boundaries.

Contamination remains the biggest threat to the water supply.

An initial study was approved to investigate this latest PCE contamination. Monitoring the wells represents Job 1 while Lahontan's proposed work plan is out for public comment.

Winter's impact will have no bearing on changing the work plan – but within reason, Lahontan Executive Officer Patty Kouyoumdjian said a day after snow ushered out summer in South Lake Tahoe.

"If it snows 6 inches, at least it would be harder to drill,"

she said.

But Lahontan needs a clear view of what is going on.

“This work plan will yield a lot of information,” she added.

Much is at stake for the water agency and the affected water districts. They’re asking for more money from the state water board.

Tetrachloroethylene, or PCE, is a manmade chemical largely used commercially as an industrial degreaser or spot remover. When improperly disposed of, the chlorinated solvent seeps into groundwater supplies.

In worst case scenarios, chronic exposure can cause damage to the liver, kidneys and central nervous system. It may also increase the risk of cancer.

Kouyoumdjian commended STPUD for stepping in to provide clean drinking water.

“It’s unfortunate for these water districts. They didn’t cause this, and in the meantime, they’re concerned about getting clean water to their clientele,” she told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Lahontan plans to host community meetings on the subject.

This isn’t the first time STPUD has been forced to deal with a contaminant issue. In 1997, the gas additive MTBE – methyl tertiary butyl ether – was found in a dozen wells. The wells, among gas stations were consequently shut down. The district sued big oil in 2001 and won a \$69 million lawsuit from 33 oil companies.

Like MTBE, the latest toxin – PCE – is a water solvent that represents a challenge corralling. It can move fast and wide.

The Y in particular is characterized as a commercial zone with the types of businesses deemed with disposing of chemical

waste.

“There are lots of industrial businesses in that area,” said Jennifer Lukins, who runs the Lukins water district.

The profile of the area makes it susceptible to this type of groundwater contamination.

Suspect sought in Stateline burglaries



Peter Quillian

Douglas County sheriff's investigators are looking for a man they believe to be responsible for a rash of burglaries in the Lower Kingsbury Grade area.

The man's name is Peter Quillian. No precise description was provided.

Anyone with information about Quillian's whereabouts is asked to call 775.782.5126.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Seat belts save lives – even firefighters'

By Kathryn Reed

Maybe if seat belts had been mandatory in the 1960s a 29-year-old Lake Valley firefighter would not have died.

The July 9, 1964, *Tahoe Daily Tribune* had a story about Larry Stewart who was a passenger in a pumper tanker driven by James Stephens. They were on their way to a fire at Camp Richardson. The engine went around a corner, the driver tried to avoid a car pulled off to the side, the ladders on the side of the engine were snagged on trees, and Stephens lost control. The fire truck ran into a tree.

The story says, "California Highway Patrolmen reaching the scene found Stewart pinned in the wreckage and Stephens standing nearby trying to give help."

Stewart died and was buried at Happy Homestead Cemetery. Stephens survived with minor injuries.

When asked about the incident, current Lake Valley spokeswoman Kileigh Labrado said only one person was in the fire engine. Asked what the findings from the investigation were – she didn't respond. Asked if there were seat belts in the engines then – more avoidance.

Ask any first responder and they'll tell you seat belts save lives. It's cops, firefighters, and paramedics who see the carnage when the safety devices aren't worn.

In California, the law has been on the books since 1986. A couple of states enacted seat belt laws in 1985, with the last

holdout being Maine in 1995. While that is when the law took effect, vehicles had seat belts long before then.

Besides being a state law, a seat belt is a required piece of equipment in the fire industry just like a helmet.

In Burton Clark's book "I Can't Save You, But I'll Die Trying: The American Fire Culture" he has an entire chapter about seat belts.

Lake Valley is keeping pretty mum about the incident in August when a captain fell out of a moving fire engine after taking his seat belt off. The agency said it happened when he was taking his jacket off and it got hung up on the door lever.

The captain is out on medical leave. The extent of his injuries has not been released, nor is it known if he intends to return to work.

The agency also isn't revealing if any of the three on board will be or have been disciplined. In the fire industry it is the driver's responsibility to ensure everyone has a seat belt on.

As for the California Highway Patrol, they are not assessing blame to the driver.

"This collision was found to be 'other than driver' simply because the driver of the fire truck did not have anything to do with his passenger falling from the truck. The passenger was removing his jacket when part of his uniform caught the handle, opening the door and allowing the passenger to fall out," Officer Ruth Loehr told *Lake Tahoe News*. "No citations were issued. We do not normally write citations from collisions."

The state Occupational Safety and Health Administration is still investigating. A fine is the likely outcome.

Lake Valley is governed by a board of directors, but it is not

kept in the loop on things like this.

“To my knowledge there are ‘no protocols’ for when the board is notified of incidents,” board Chairman Bob Bettencourt told *Lake Tahoe News*. “If there is a significant sensitive event or incident, it is brought to the board in a closed session which unfortunately cannot be disseminated outside the closed session.”

UNR quake lab tests bridge design for Caltrans



Three 27-ton, 14 x 14-foot table platens are lifted into place by the lab's 30-ton cranes as the lab crew continues installing equipment in the earthquake engineering facility at UNR. Photo/Mike Wolterbeek/UNR

By Scott Sonner, AP

RENO – Scientists at a Nevada earthquake lab on Wednesday tested new bridge designs with connectors they say are innovative and created to better withstand violent temblors and speed reconstruction efforts after major quake damage.

UNR engineers performed the experiments on a giant “shake table” to simulate violent motions of an earthquake to rattle a 100-ton, 70 foot bridge model to determine how well it would hold up.

UNR’s Earthquake Engineering Lab is the largest of its kind in the United States.

The latest project is funded by Caltrans, which currently is developing plans for 10 pilot projects based on the developing bridge connector technology.

Read the whole story

Woman killed in motorcycle crash identified

The motorcyclist who died last weekend in Hope Valley has been identified as Charleen Blackburn.

The 64-year-old South Lake Tahoe woman was turning onto Highway 89 from Highway 88 on Sept. 17 when she was struck by a vehicle.

The driver was not able to break in time to avoid hitting the rider who turned in front of her.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Home pot delivery may be coming to Nev.

By Ray Hagar, Nevada Newsmakers

State Sen. Tick Segerblom, D-Las Vegas, predicted this week on Nevada Newsmakers that Nevada will soon have home delivery of recreational marijuana.

Segerblom, who helped guide regulations of Nevada's medical and recreational marijuana industries through the Legislature, said home deliveries will begin soon after the state enacts permanent regulations next year.

"It's a done deal," Segerblom said. "We're doing it right now for medical (marijuana). It works perfect.

"The police like it," Segerblom said from a Clark County perspective. "Obviously, you have to verify who is getting it but it is no different than someone going to a store, showing an ID and buying it."

Read the whole story

Adults without kids cause ripple effects in housing

market

By Adina Solomon, Washington Post

Sara Moran's closet in her Colonial house, built in 1920, once served as a nursery for a past homeowner. But Moran and her husband don't need that nursery. They have no plans to extend beyond the confines of their two bedrooms and small yard in Stratford, Conn.

The fertility rate in the United States has fallen to its lowest levels since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began keeping records in 1909. The general fertility rate is the total number of births per 1,000 women age 15 to 44. According to provisional data, the rate last year was 62 births per 1,000 women.

The decrease in the number of people having children affects the real estate market and decisions.

Read the whole story

Summer home sales spike in El Dorado County

By Hudson Sangree, Sacramento Bee

More homes were sold across the four-county Sacramento region this summer than in any similar period since the peak of the housing bubble in 2005, CoreLogic reported Wednesday.

In the Sacramento suburbs, El Dorado County's median sale price for new and existing homes in August was \$483,000, up 16

percent from the same time last year and the highest it's been in a decade, CoreLogic said. The high median price for new homes there, more than \$600,000, helped boost that figure.

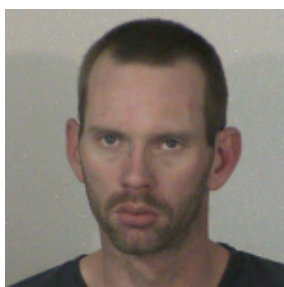
El Dorado County had by far the highest price for new homes in the four-county region this summer.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe man arrested on multiple felony charges

A parolee from South Lake Tahoe who was wanted on a misdemeanor warrant from Stateline was arrested on felony charges this week in Douglas County.

Deputies stopped Ray Brashears, 33, on Sept. 19 at about 9pm while he was driving in Minden.



Ray Brashears

“DCSO K-9 Bak was used and he alerted to methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia from the exterior of the vehicle,” the department said in a press release.

Investigators said they found five used hypodermic needles and 0.4 grams of methamphetamine.

During the search of the vehicle they found a wallet with a Medicaid card, military ID, Social Security card and a Nevada driver's license not belonging to Brashears. Deputies located three cell phones, blank checks, equipment and materials which may have been used in counterfeiting documents and identification.

Bashears was arrested on the warrant, along with charges of obtaining/using personal identifying information of another person to harm or impersonate them, possession of a financial forgery laboratory, forgery, and possession of hypodermic needle.

Bail was set at \$211,592, though he was place on a parole-probation hold.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

1 fatality in 16-vehicle accident; snow an issue



First snow of the season on Sept. 21 at
Sugar Bowl. Photo/Sugar Bowl

Westbound Interstate 80 is closed Thursday afternoon because of a 16-vehicle fatal accident.

Other injuries have been reported.

The freeway is closed at Eagle Lakes. Traffic is being turned around at Kingvale.

Snow has closed Ebbetts (Highway 4), Tioga (Highway 120) and Sonora (Higjway 108) passes.

Residents on Upper Kingsbury Grade woke up to a couple inches of snow on Sept. 21.

Tahoe City has received measurable snow.

It has been snowing on and off on the South Shore; as of 2pm it was starting to stick in Meyers.

Scattered rain and snow showers are also in the forecast for Friday, with sun returning for the weekend. The temperature will be increasing as well.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*