



Enforcement News

Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

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LAHONTAN WATER BOARD ISSUES ENFORCEMENT ORDER AGAINST SOUTH LAKE TAHOE GAS STATION AFTER CONTAMINANT FOUND IN DRINKING WATER WELL

For Immediate Release

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August 22, 2014

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Recent sampling of a drinking water well at a motel near the Nevada state line in South Lake Tahoe revealed the presence of the contaminant MTBE (methyl tertiary butyl ether) at concentrations above the drinking water standard for taste and odor.

As a result, the Lahontan Regional Water Board has issued a new enforcement action against Tahoe Tom's Gasoline Station, at 4029 Lake Tahoe Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe. The gasoline station, which is near the motel, has been the source of past releases of petroleum products from gasoline underground storage tank pipelines and dispensers going back to 1991.

"It is imperative that all water supply wells be protected, whether they are municipal wells providing water to thousands of customers or motel wells providing water to dozens of customers," said Patty Kouyoumdjian, Executive Officer of the Lahontan Water Board,

Previous cleanup and abatement orders directed the gasoline station's responsible parties, Mohammad Ahmad and the Thomas E. Erickson Trust, to remediate contamination and reduce the threat to nearby drinking water wells. The responsible parties did not always comply with the numerous enforcement orders involving the property and, in 2009, the Water Board issued administrative civil liability penalties against the responsible parties totaling \$412,900. The fine was never paid.

The MTBE detections in the motel well have been increasing during the past year, probably as a result of drought conditions lowering the water table.

MTBE was added to gasoline in the U.S. in the 1980s to increase oxygen content and reduce emissions. As the compound found its way into the environment from leaking underground storage tanks, it was determined to migrate great distances in groundwater and significantly affect drinking water aquifers. California banned the compound by 2004, but it remained in Nevada gasoline until 2007. MTBE in aquifers has reduced over time, however the drought appears to be increasing groundwater concentrations of residual petroleum left in soil.

The new cleanup and abatement order lists strict remedial requirements and deadlines to be implemented by the responsible parties. Lake Tahoe Investments, Inc., the new owner of the site, has been added as a responsible party in the order. Requirements include operating a remediation system on the gas station property and off-site remediation where needed. The responsible parties are required to collect water samples from the motel well and other nearby water supply wells quarterly. If MTBE or



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other petroleum hydrocarbons are detected above the primary drinking water standard of 13 parts per billion, the responsible parties must provide an alternate water supply to the affected well owner(s). To date, MTBE or other hydrocarbons have not been detected in other water supply wells.