Tainted soil to be removed from ZC Resort

By Kathryn Reed

In the five years since a fuel leak was detected at Zephyr Cove Resort more than 1,400 tons of petroleum product have been extracted from the soil.

While work to clean up the site has been ongoing since the contamination was discovered in fall 2011, the next step in the process is about to begin. This will include digging a trench about 25-feet deep close to Highway 50 and back to the parking attendant kiosk.

Officials will test the soil throughout this next process, which will begin Sept. 12. The plan is to have this work done by Oct. 15. The goal is to remove even more contaminated dirt – 2,500 tons; all of which is shipped outside the basin. In the process more than a dozen trees had to be felled.

Jonathan Cook-Fisher with the U.S. Forest Service told *Lake Tahoe News*, "We very likely will be monitoring this site for years to come."

The Forest Service owns the land, while Aramark operates the various businesses on site.

The commercial entities will remain open, though parking will be affected.

A sparge unit injects air into the soil to get the vapors out. Photo/LTN file

Even though the underground fuel tanks had been inspected annually, it wasn’t until five years ago that the leak was detected. It is not known how much gasoline actually escaped or how long it had been seeping out.

Cook-Fisher said the tanks were in place before the USFS owned the land. He said situations like this one underscore the hazards of underground tanks and why they are no longer in vogue.

Today the tanks are on the pier. And while this obviously puts them closer to the waters of Lake Tahoe, Cook-Fisher said it’s safer there because of the ability to conduct better tests on the equipment and the safety mechanisms that are in place. Plus, being above ground allows for the opportunity to smell and see the product.

While the plume is good size, it has not reached Lake Tahoe.

It starts near where the tanks used to be (they were removed in 2012), goes under the restaurant parking lot and moves northwest toward the pier.

Monitoring of the test wells shows the extent of the contamination is decreasing, Cook-Fisher said.