

Toxic algae continues to cover Keys canals

By Kathryn Reed

Tests on the water of the Tahoe Keys canals continue to show blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria.

The toxic algae have been in the lagoons of this South Lake Tahoe neighborhood since **at least Aug. 11.**

“Based on the levels being detected in last week’s samples, coupled with the site-indicators present (floating scum, blue-green color), we recommended that TKPOA continue to post caution advisories and advise pet owners to be especially careful if their dog might play in the affected water. Unlike a human, a dog can be exposed to the toxin by drinking the water, eating a glob of algae that might contain the toxins, and further by grooming their coats when they get out of the water with saturated fur,” Mary Fiore-Wagner, senior environmental scientist with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She sent an email to veterinarians about the low levels of cyanotoxins – Anatoxin-A and microcystin that were found in water samples last week and the potential harm to dogs. Detailed information was sent to the doctors so they would be aware of symptoms.

Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association took additional water samples on Aug. 28. The results are not in yet.

The blooms are improving in some locations, but have developed in others. Cyanobacteria blooms can look like slicks of opaque, bright green paint, or “pea soup,” but closer inspection often reveals the grainy, sawdust-like appearance of individual colonies, according to the state Water Board.

“Next week we are coordinating with TKPOA to initiate a larger sampling effort throughout the Tahoe Keys waterways. EPA-Region 9 will be supporting the effort by funding analysis of one of the toxins being detected (microcystins). Analysis will be through the EPA-9 laboratory. Additionally, several field duplicates samples – samples collected at the same time, from the same location – will be collected and run at a commercial laboratory paid for by TKPOA and the EPA-Region 9 laboratory for analysis of Anatoxin-A,” Fiore-Wagner said.

The state Department of Water Resources on Friday sent out information about the various algal blooms in California what with Labor Day weekend being big for boating and swimming.

The Keys has not limited boating activity in the contaminated canals, but human contact with those waters is not advised.

Toxic blue-green algae exposure can cause eye irritation, allergic skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea, and cold- and flu-like symptoms.

The state said, “Bloom conditions can change rapidly, and wind and waves may move or concentrate the bloom into different regions of the lakes. Algal blooms can appear as blue-green, white or brown foam, scum, or mats that can float on the water’s surface and accumulate along shorelines and boat ramp areas.”

Here are the statewide guidelines regarding waters with blue-green algae:

- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water, swim through algae, scums, or mats or lick their fur after going in the water. Rinse pets in clean water to remove algae from fur.

- Avoid wading, swimming, and jet or water skiing in water containing algae blooms, scums, or mats.

- Do not drink, cook, or wash dishes with untreated surface water from these areas under any circumstances; common water purification techniques such as camping filters, tablets, and boiling do not remove toxins.
 - People should not eat mussels or other bivalves collected from affected waters. Limit or avoid eating fish taken from these waters; if fish are consumed, remove the guts and liver, and rinse fillets in clean drinking water.
 - Get medical treatment immediately if you think you, your pet or livestock have been poisoned by blue-green algae toxins. Be sure to alert the medical professional to the possible contact with blue-green algae.
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SLT revamping upper management compensation

By Kathryn Reed

While the 2017-18 budget is on Tuesday's South Lake Tahoe council docket, an item tucked on the consent agenda may be the bigger news. Employees not represented by a union are voluntarily rejiggering how they get paid in an effort to save the city money and provide themselves with a cushion if CalPERS implodes.

City Manager Nancy Kerry earlier this summer was the first city employee to go down this road.

At the Sept. 5 meeting if the electeds OK the plan, the compensation changes will affect all unrepresented employees, which includes the fire chief, police chief, director of

development services, finance director, public works director, airport manager, human resources manager, deputy city attorney, deputy director of development services, communications manager, unrepresented/non-management administrative employees in the city manager's office, and any other unrepresented employees who may be added.

(The city manager and city attorney have separate contracts, and negotiate terms directly with the council members. With **Tom Watson leaving** at the end of the month, it is unknown how the future city attorney's compensation package will be structured.)

The changes for the rest of the unrepresented employees would be effective Oct. 1 and go through the end of 2018.

Kerry in her report to the council wrote, "To be clear, CalPERS plans to extract approximately 25 percent of the city's revenues within the next five years, which will severely hamper the city's ability to meet current expenses as well as any new expenses."

The city is forecasting a negative cash flow by 2020 in large part because CalPERS obligations are forecasted to double in the next five years.

The California Public Employees Retirement System tells member agencies how much each must pay to cover current and projected retirees. These people get a promised amount of cash which actually on average goes up 2 percent a year. The money comes from taxpayers. It is an obligation members must pay and one they cannot negotiate. It would take an act of the Legislature to change this.

Unfunded CalPERS liabilities are growing for most organizations. Today the city's liability is \$50 million, and is expected to grow to \$60 million in a few years.

Kerry in the report went on to say, "Many CalPERS retirees

have the incorrect belief that their pensions are 'paid for,' and thus are not at risk."

South Lake Tahoe officials are trying to get rank and file employees as well as retirees to realize the gravy train might derail.

That is why at least the non-union employees of South Lake Tahoe are hedging their bets by restructuring their compensation plan. All employees could, but it would take the will of the union to do something that in many ways is radically different.

The purpose of the changes is to stem the city's pension obligation, while at the same time providing workers with more control over their future retirement dollars and being able to give them raises. If CalPERS were to go bankrupt or cut payments, they would still have the cash in the 401(a) or 457 accounts.

The police and fire chiefs have agreed to reduce their pensionable salaries to \$140,000 a year, the maximum recognized under the 2013 California Public Employees' Pension Reform Act. The remainder (\$29,291) will go into an employer funded retirement account that would be similar to a private sector 401(k).

Employees other than the chiefs, city manager and city attorney will have money put into a non-pensionable retirement account.

Raises they all will receive would be one-time payments that go into the new retirement funds.

In essence their base pay has been frozen and the raise automatically goes into a retirement account instead of being disposable income.

Kerry summarized the changes by saying, "The proposed

compensation plan for unrepresented employees utilizes a defined contribution approach and considers the city's current available financial resources while simultaneously not obligating the city to long-term financial obligations."

A benefit change is this group will now have paid time off instead of separate vacation and sick pay.

Opinion: Importance of fire rating system

By Lisa Herron

As we drive through the state and national forests we have all seen the Smokey Bear fire danger rating signs. What do those signs mean and what are the criteria for low, moderate, high, very high and extreme ratings?

What is the National Fire Danger Rating System?

The National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) is a system allowing fire managers to estimate today's or tomorrow's fire danger for a given area. The system combines the effects of existing and expected states of selected fire danger factors into one or more qualitative or numeric indices reflecting the area's fire protection needs. It links an organization's readiness level (or pre-planned fire suppression actions) to the potential fire problems of the day.

Knowledge of these levels can guide forest visitors to make decisions regarding whether or not to have a campfire or ride their OHV in a grassy area. Homeowners may choose to postpone burning a debris pile if they are aware of the fire danger

level for that day. Contractors working in the forest may consider extra precautions when using equipment which might produce sparks. In some cases, the National Forest may even restrict certain activities based on the fire danger levels.

- What fire danger factors are used to get the fire danger rating?

- The key inputs into the NFDRS model are: fuels, weather, topography and risks.

- How is fire danger different than fire behavior predictions?

Fire danger is a broad scale assessment while fire behavior is site specific. In other words, fire danger ratings describe conditions reflecting the potential, over a large area, for a fire to ignite, spread and require suppression action. Fire behavior deals with an existing fire in a given time and space, describing the movement, intensity and indicators of rapid combustion of an ongoing fire.

What do you mean by adjective rating?

The “adjective ratings” are a public information description of the relative severity of the current fire danger situation in a general area. Adjective ratings are generally posted on signs as visitors enter public lands or at agency offices. Many people associate these signs as “Smokey Bear signs”.

What are the different levels and what do they mean?

We use five different color-coded levels to help the public understand fire potential. The purpose of this is for visitors to understand the current conditions and help mitigate their actions to prevent human-caused wildfires.

Fire danger level: Low

When the fire danger is “low” it means fuels don’t ignite

easily from small embers, but a more intense heat source, such as lightning, may start fires in duff or dry rotten wood. Fires in open, dry grasslands may burn easily a few hours after a rain, but most wood fires will spread slowly, creeping or smoldering. Control of fires is generally easy.

Fire danger level: Moderate

When the fire danger is “moderate” it means fires can start from most accidental causes, but the number of fire starts is usually pretty low. If a fire does start in an open, dry grassland, it will burn and spread quickly on windy days. Most wood fires will spread slowly to moderately. Average fire intensity will be moderate except in heavy concentrations of fuel, which may burn hot. Fires are still not likely to become serious and are often easy to control.

Fire danger level: High

When the fire danger is “high” fires can start easily from most causes and small fuels (such as grasses and needles) will ignite readily. Unattended campfires and brush fires are likely to escape. Fires will spread easily, with some areas of high-intensity burning on slopes or concentrated fuels. Fires can become serious and difficult to control unless they are put out while they are still small.

Fire danger level: Very high

When the fire danger is “very high” fires will start easily from most causes. The fires will spread rapidly and have a quick increase in intensity, right after ignition. Small fires can quickly become large fires and exhibit extreme fire intensity, such as long-distance spotting and fire whirls. These fires can be difficult to control and will often become much larger and longer-lasting fires.

Fire danger level: Extreme

When the fire danger is “extreme” fires of all types start quickly and burn intensely. All fires are potentially serious and can spread very quickly with intense burning. Small fires become big fires much faster than at the “very high” level. Spot fires are probable, with long-distance spotting likely. These fires are very difficult to fight and may become very dangerous and often last for several days.

Red flag warning/fire weather watch

A red flag warning is a forecast warning issued by the National Weather Service to inform area firefighting and land management agencies conditions are ideal for wildland fire combustion, and rapid spread. These agencies often alter their staffing and equipment resources dramatically to accommodate the forecast risk. To the public, a red flag warning means high fire danger with increased probability of a quickly spreading vegetation fire in the area within 24 hours.

The weather criteria for fire weather watches and red flag warnings usually include the daily vegetation moisture content calculations, expected afternoon high temperature, afternoon minimum relative humidity and daytime wind speed.

Outdoor burning bans may also be proclaimed by local law and fire agencies based on red flag warnings.

A separate but less imminent forecast may include a fire weather watch, which is issued to alert fire and land management agencies to the possibility that red flag conditions may exist beyond the first forecast period (12 hours). The watch is issued generally 12 to 48 hours in advance of the expected conditions, but can be issued up to 72 hours in advance if the NWS agency is reasonably confident. The term fire weather watch is headlined in the routine forecast and issued as a product. The watch then remains in effect until it expires, is canceled, or upgraded to a red flag warning.

Lisa Herron works for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

20% in U.S. find workplace hostile or threatening

By Paul Wiseman, AP

The American workplace is grueling, stressful and hostile.

So concludes an in-depth study of 3,066 U.S. workers by the Rand Corp., Harvard Medical School and UCLA. Among the findings:

- Nearly 1 in 5 workers – a share the study calls “disturbingly high” – say they face a hostile or threatening environment at work, which can include sexual harassment and bullying. Workers who have to face customers endure a disproportionate share of abuse.
- Nearly 55 percent say they face “unpleasant and potentially hazardous” conditions.
- Nearly three-quarters say they spend at least a fourth of their time on the job in “intense or repetitive physical” labor.

Read the whole story

Delays on Hwy. 50 in SLT about to get worse

Motorists can expect longer delays on a section of Highway 50 in South Lake Tahoe beginning next week because lane restrictions will be increased.

Work has been suspended for the Labor Day weekend.

Beginning Tuesday at 12:01am the contractor is permitted to reduce the highway to one open lane in each direction around the clock until 11am on Fridays. The work schedule for the remainder of the construction season will be around the clock from midnight Sunday to 11am Friday. Motorists can expect delays of up to 30 minutes.

Construction on the \$56 million water-quality improvement project is taking place from the Y to Winnemucca Avenue this season. This is the first of three phases. The project will eventually extend to Trout Creek, covering two miles of the highway with new drainage filtration systems, curbs and gutters, new sidewalks, a wider highway to include 6-foot shoulders on each side, and a new roadway surface. Completion is expected in fall 2019.

**Sandoval joins group
proposing Obamacare
alternative**

By Julie Carr Smyth and James Anderson, AP

Nevada's Brian Sandoval is part of a bipartisan group of governors urging Congress to retain the federal health care law's individual mandate while seeking to stabilize individual insurance markets as legislators continue work on a long-term replacement law.

The recommendation spearheaded by Ohio Gov. John Kasich, a Republican, and Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper, a Democrat, is part of a compromise plan that's designed to be palatable to both parties. It was endorsed by eight governors who shared their plan in a letter to congressional leaders Thursday.

"Since the beginning of the recent healthcare debate I have said that I will fight for the Nevadans who now have access to healthcare as a result of the Medicaid expansion and Silver State Health Insurance Exchange," Sandoval said in a statement to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. "I have also stated that I will fight against any plan that places an increased financial burden on Nevada. Holding states harmless should be a priority as Congress continues to debate federal healthcare policies."

Read the whole story

Slinkard Fire on Hwy. 395 continues to grow

The Slinkard Fire is estimated to be 9,00 acres with 12 percent containment as of early Friday night.

Topaz has been evacuated north of Highway 89 to the Nevada state line.

For public safety, Highway 89 remains closed between highways

395 and 4 (at Monitor Pass). Highway 395 is closed from the junction of Highway 182 in Bridgeport to the Nevada state line. However, Highway 395 will be open with highway patrol escort when safe.

Liberty Utilities is getting ready to re-energize the damaged line.

"All customers in the Topaz-Coleville-Walker area should have power restored by 5pm if this works. If it fails because there's more damage than we can see and access), then we'll fire up the temporary generator we're currently installing," Kathy Carter with Liberty said.

The fire is located in Slinkard Valley and the west slope of Antelope Valley, west of Topaz in Mono County, California. The fire is burning in cheat grass, sagebrush and pinyon/juniper.

Lightning started the fire earlier this week.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe City clothing event just for women

Alpenglow Sports in Tahoe City is having an event just for women on Sept. 27 from 6:30-9pm.

Anita Sports Bras will have bras for every body type and activity. Whether you need a bra for low impact activities like yoga, or high impact sports like running that bra will be available.

This will be a great opportunity to gather your teammates,

running partners, and yoga girlfriends to try and buy the best sports bras, handpicked for you by the Alpenglow staff.

In addition to sports bras, RYPwear Skirts will be at the event. They are designed by athletes for athletes.

Tahoe Womens Backcountry will also be sharing what they have planned for the upcoming season.

Agility equipment added to Tahoe Vista dog park

Thanks to an \$8,000 grant from Dog Day in the Park, the Tahoe Unleashed Dog Park in the North Tahoe Regional Park has added dog agility equipment to the small dog, large dog and outback areas of the park.

Dog Day in the Park was instrumental in developing and constructing the Tahoe Unleashed Dog Park in the North Tahoe Regional Park.

A variety of equipment was purchased including an “up and over” bridge walk, crawl tube, adjustable jumps, fire hydrants, and a ring jump.

Ski resorts worry feds may

cut visa workers program

By Hugo Martin, Los Angeles Times

The Trump administration is considering overhauling a program that allows foreign college students to work temporarily in the United States, sparking panic among operators of ski resorts and concessions at state and national parks who rely heavily on such seasonal help.

In a conference call Wednesday, ski resort operators and other tourism industry officials urged representatives of Trump's domestic policy staff to keep intact the so-called J-1 visa program.

Tourism executives who participated in the call said Trump officials were polite and inquisitive, but did not indicate how they planned to change the program, if at all.

Read the whole story