Pressure to be applied to SLT’s top energy users

By Kathryn Reed

In order to become a more sustainable city when it comes to electric and natural gas usage, it’s important to know how much of those products is being consumed.

South Lake Tahoe’s 100 Percent Renewable Committee this week gave an update to the City Council that included data from the free State and Local Energy Data analysis.

The purpose, according to committee members, is to estimate the greenhouse gas reduction potential of the city. The analysis showed commercial properties use the most electricity, then residential and then government. The top commercial user is Barton Memorial Hospital with 11,279 megawatt hours, followed by the 37 lodging properties with a combined use of 5,443 MWh, and 17 food and beverage outlets at 4,968 MWh.

The hospital is also the largest user of natural gas, at 45,790 Mcf. (An Mcf is a thousand cubic feet of natural gas.) The lodging establishments use 9,594 Mcf. The third top users are the three businesses considered waste management and remediation services, with 5,324 Mcf.

Suggestions to lower consumption include:

· Retrofitting buildings

· Challenge programs for households, businesses and industries

· Targeted outreach to neighborhoods

· Create a one-stop for technical services coupled with

utility incentives.

The committee plans to work with the top five users of both categories to work on ways they could reduce consumption.

In April the council passed the resolution to achieve 100 percent renewable energy by 2032. In addition to wanting the city to be using renewable energy, reducing the use is part of the goal.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District was singled out as an entity that has taken great strides to lower its energy use.

Heavenly Mountain Resort was not part of the study because its meters are either in El Dorado or Douglas counties.

The committee plans to come back to the council with recommendations after further analysis is completed.

Wildfires can wipe out Calif. greenhouse gas gains

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

Most years, the amount of greenhouse gases spewed by California's cars, factories and power plants drops slightly — a hard-won result of the state's fight against global warming.

And in any given year, one big wildfire can wipe out that progress.

Over the course of just a few weeks, a major fire can pump more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than California's many climate change programs can save in 12 months. Scientists

debate whether California's vast forests are emitting more carbon dioxide through fires than they absorb through plant growth.

As global warming raises temperatures, making fires like the ones that tore through the Wine Country last month more likely, it could turn into a vicious cycle.

Read the whole story

Truckee trash franchise changes coming in 2018

The Truckee council on Dec. 12 is expected to sign a 10-year agreement with Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal.

The new agreement includes significant changes to residential and commercial services.

The biggest service changes for residents will be the roll-out of containerized recyclable and yard trimming collection. Each household will receive a 64-gallon wheeled blue cart for all recyclables and a 96-gallon wheeled green cart for all yard waste. Recyclables and yard waste will be picked up curbside on alternating weeks. Residents have the option to opt out of recycling carts and continue to use blue bags.

There is, however, no opt out option for yard waste; all residents must use green carts as green bags will no longer be accepted after June 30.

The new services will also expand existing dumpster and drop-off services for yard waste. Other notable service changes include two new locations for recycling drop-off during the

summer months and two free pick ups of large items per year.

These changes will reach residents over the next three years. All Truckee residents will receive yard waste carts in June for use beginning July 1. The Glenshire neighborhood will receive recyclables carts in September and begin with the new recycling service changes on Oct. 1, 2018. Remaining Truckee neighborhoods excluding Tahoe-Donner will start using blue carts in 2019. Tahoe-Donner residents will begin the new program in 2020.

All residents will continue to use their current trash cans for mixed waste materials.

Commercial customers will receive wildlife-resistant food waste carts that will be serviced up to three times a week.

The meeting starts at 6pm at the Truckee Town Hall.

Transformer replacement to lessen Liberty outages



Tyson Hurd and Josh Kleinschmidt hook up a transformer in the Tahoe Keys on Nov. 21. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Power outages are never fun. And when the problem isn't obvious, it's worse for everyone – including the crews tasked with solving the issue.

Last weekend a swath of the Tahoe Keys was without power. A transformer had gone out in this South Lake Tahoe neighborhood. It needed it replacing.

The problem is when the Keys was built in the late 1960s all of the transformers were submersible. In other words, they are underground and likely sitting in water because of the high water table. Even when some were replaced in the 1980s, back underground they went.

Aesthetically, putting electrical transformers underground made sense. Practically, though, the logic was missing.

“The submersibles are mapped, but they’re hard to find,” Nick Rains, a patrolman with Liberty Utilities, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A backhoe is brought in and it’s a bit of a guessing game.”

In winter it is even more problematic with snow and the ground being frozen.



Crews maneuver the green transformer box into place. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Rains was out with a crew this week on Venice Drive replacing the transformer that died three days earlier. To do so required getting permission from the homeowner to place a green box in their front yard. Most people don’t want it there, so it can take some negotiating.

Liberty has a program to replace all the submersible transformers. But when one goes out, like last Saturday, then it rises to the top of the list. The new ones have a life expectancy of about 30 years.

When Liberty bought the territory from NV Energy in 2011 there

were more than 130 of these submersible transformers, with most being in the Keys. Since then about 80 percent have been replaced.

“Liberty has made the change-out program a priority; investing about $100,000 per year with a goal to change out an average of 10 per year,” Jeff Matthews, manager of engineering and planning for Liberty Utilities, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Liberty wasn’t able to change out as many submersible transformers this year because of the high water table due to the extreme snow earlier this year.”

Doing any repair work can be a nightmare on the submersibles. The above ground ones make it so outages don’t last as long because the work can be done faster. The technology also allows for outages to not be as widespread by rerouting customers.

Another concern of the submersibles is what they are doing to the environment.

“A potential toxin of concern for electric transformers contaminating groundwater is polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which were formerly used in transformer oil. (South Tahoe Public Utility District) tests all of our wells regularly for PCBs and has never found PCBs in our drinking water,” Shelly Thomsen with STPUD told *LTN.* “By moving electrical equipment above ground, Liberty Utilities is moving in the right direction to greatly minimize any issues relating to groundwater in the future.”

Utility companies are mandated to test the water in these vaults when pumping is required to access the components.

“Not all older transformers had PCBs in the internal fluids. I am not concerned about the individual older transformers units that may have had PCBs because the hydrostatic pressure from being submersed in water helps keep the contents inside and individual units usually have very little internal fluids.

Also, PCBs have a high affinity for adhering to soil particles, which makes the PCBs less likely to leach into groundwater," Doug Smith, assistant executive officer with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

According to Matthews, Liberty has not had any issues with its transformers in regards to contaminants.

Damaged roads from last winter still an issue in EDC

By Vicki Gonzalez, KCRA-TV

The aftermath of relentless winter storms can still be seen throughout El Dorado County, after a series of destructive systems crippled dozens of locations at the start of 2017.

"It was a year none of us have really ever seen up here," John Kahling, with the El Dorado County Department of Transportation, said. "We've got a lot of hilly terrain that causes water to move faster and get into more concentrated flows. And when you have that in areas that haven't seen rain – serious rain – for several years, erosion and other damage is bound to happen."

The county has been working nonstop to repair the damage. Many major routes are back up and running after being shut down for months.

Read the whole story

FCC chair wants to repeal net neutrality rules

By Brian Fung, Washington Post

The Federal Communications Commission took aim at a signature Obama-era regulation Tuesday, unveiling a plan that would give Internet providers broad powers to determine what websites and online services their customers see and use.

Under the agency's proposal, providers of high-speed internet services, such as Comcast, Verizon and AT&T, would be able to block websites they do not like and charge Web companies for speedier delivery of their content.

The FCC's effort would roll back its net neutrality regulation which was passed by the agency's Democrats in 2015 and attempted to make sure all Web content, whether from big or small companies, would be treated equally by internet providers.

Read the whole story

Calif. emergency drought restrictions expire Sunday

By Mike Luery, KCRA-TV

California is looking to crack down on water wasters and make

saving water a way of life – no matter how much it rains.

California's restrictions on water use in September were effective, As a result, the state saw a 15 percent drop in water use.

But those emergency regulations expire on Sunday – and that means no state enforcement until new rules can be put in place.

Read the whole story

Nev. recreational pot sales top Sept. forecast

By Colton Lochhead, Las Vegas Review-Journal

Nevada's recreational marijuana continued its strong start through the third full month of sales, data released Monday by the Nevada Department of Taxation show.

The state's licensed and regulated cannabis dispensaries sold approximately $27.7 million in recreational marijuana in September – more than $5 million over the state's projected sales for the month.

Read the whole story

NASA: 2017 likely to be 2nd warmest year on record

By Jonathan Erdman, Weather Channel

Global temperatures are on pace to make 2017 the second warmest year in 137 years of record keeping, according analyses by NASA and the Japanese Meteorological Agency.

October 2017 was the second warmest October in records dating to 1880, according to data released by NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Only 2015 had a warmer October in NASA's analysis than 2017.

The first 10 months of 2017 as a whole rank second warmest only to 2016, according to NASA and JMA.

Read the whole story

Wine Country fires show mutual aid inadequacies

By Joaquin Palomino and Kimberly Veklerov, San Francisco Chronicle

In the early hours of the most destructive firestorm in California history, officials in Napa and Sonoma counties knew their local first responders would be overwhelmed and turned to a statewide mutual-aid system designed to swiftly bring in support crews from other regions to protect homes and save lives.

They got help, but they didn’t get what they asked for — not nearly.

Commanders in the two counties requested 305 fire engines through the state’s mutual-aid program as the Tubbs Fire swept west from Calistoga to Santa Rosa and the Atlas Fire raced through the hills north of the city of Napa. But only 130 engines would be sent to those blazes over the first 12 hours, according to data obtained by The Chronicle under the state’s Public Records Act.

Officials in Mendocino County, where nine people were killed by another big fire, requested 15 engines from outside the county. None was sent the first day.

Read the whole story