

California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Lahontan Region

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Contact: **Chuck Curtis**
530-542-5460

**LAHONTAN REGIONAL WATER BOARD PROPOSES \$700,000
PENALTY FOR JULY'S BIG LAKE TAHOE SEWAGE SPILL**

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE – Following last July's massive Lake Tahoe sewage spill, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board has proposed a \$700,000 penalty for the two property owners involved and the contractor they hired to build a pier.

The Administrative Civil Liability complaint is for the 120,000 gallons of untreated sewage that erupted from under the Tahoe lakebed when the contractor's pile driver punched a hole in a buried sewer pipe just off shore from Kings Beach (Placer County). The complaint states that the maximum penalty for the incident could be \$1,200,000 but that the reasonable penalty is about 60 percent of that amount.

Named in the complaint are C. Geoffrey and Christine Davis and Hans and Margaret Coffeng, the two property owners, and the contractor they employed to build a pier, Pacific Built, Inc.

The spill occurred the afternoon of July 19, 2005 when Pacific Built Inc., punctured a 14-inch sewer force main while driving a pile for a pier support. The North Tahoe Public Utility District (NTPUD) owns the sewer main. Pressurized sewage spewed into Lake Tahoe for about five hours, but much of it was trapped and returned to the sewer system. However, enough pollution reached the waters of Lake Tahoe that local North Tahoe beaches had to be closed for 10 to 16 days.

The complaint also states that Pacific Built, Inc., failed to check with Underground Service Alert of Northern California (USA North) before beginning construction. Such a check represents "a typical standard of care to locate underground utilities prior to commencing an excavation activity."

However, the complaint also notes that the construction company employees offered their help and equipment to the NTPUD in the hours after the pipe was punctured.

The property owners and contractor ("dischargers") face a hearing within 90 days. If the proposed penalty is imposed, the money will be paid to the Waste Discharge Permit Fund to protect the state's water quality.

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