

Bear #753 chased out of preschool

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SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. – A bear and her cub made their way into Step by Step Early Learning Center on September 15, continuing the trend of bears entering buildings this fall. While other mother bears are also responsible for entrances, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is particularly concerned with bear #753 and assert that they will euthanize her if she's spotted.

Early in the morning on September 15, co-director Mireya Torrez opened the building to start the week. She and one other staff member were present, so Torrez said she was confused when she saw building blocks and other toys scattered on the ground.

"I was wondering if the cleaning staff had let one of their kids in to play over the weekend because it looked like stuff had been messed with or played with," said Torrez. Then, she realized that there was a bear in the building.

The bear reportedly had gotten into some of the Bread and Broth snack bags, but had left very little mess otherwise. Torrez called the police at 7:57 a.m. and they arrived on the scene at 8:02 a.m.

Before the police arrived, Torrez says the bear tried to exit the building on her own. "She was trying to find a way out for her and her cub, she wasn't messing anything else up," said Torrez. "I think she was scared and panicking." The bear entered one classroom and pushed on a window, but there was a shelf blocking the window. She and her cub then entered another classroom, broke the lock and pushed on the window to escape.

When police arrived on the scene, the bear was already exiting through the Shell gas station lot. Officers identified the window as the exit point, and Torrez said that a door was likely left unlocked over the weekend after cleaning staff had finished their work.

The CDFW also came by and collected DNA evidence. Peter Tira, spokesperson for the CDFW, said they had found the DNA evidence was from bear #753 and her cub, known also as Hope and Bounce.

"It's a management decision to kill (bear #753)," said Tira. "There's no permit needed for us to do that." Tira said she continues to break into homes and buildings, and said it was "no fault of the people" regarding her entrance into the preschool.

Tira also said that it is a goal for them to get the cub into a wildlife rehabilitation center. "We make our decisions based on science and DNA evidence, not emotion or a popularity contest. This is a measure of last resort," said Tira. He says that euthanizing mother bears like this is not done to orphan the cub, but to prevent the cub from learning undesirable behaviors that put it in contact with humans.

Torrez said that the building owner and preschool will be taking steps to ensure that bears won't return to Step by Step. They are getting the broken locks replaced, ensuring doors are locked, instituting extra precautions for the cleaning staff and ensuring the trash is locked and gated. The front door is locked by a keypad, and other entrances are typically locked. From the front desk, Torrez says it's easy to see the parking lot and staff would be able to call someone if they spotted a bear.

"It's become a little bit of a joke between us, since it was a mom and her cub, that she was looking for enrollment," said Torrez. But they are taking these precautions seriously as other schools were broken into—Toogee Sielsch, also known as "Tahoe Toogee" posted that he [lent a bear mat to a preschool](#) that had a bear enter to take a nap.

Executive director of the BEAR League Anne Bryant said there are six mother bears in South Lake Tahoe alone, and that currently, the bears have plenty to forage. So, she argues, it's not out of desperation that these bears are entering houses and schools—it's negligence on the human side. Bryant says they have chased Hope and Bounce out of other residences that are left open.

Other BEAR League members say that because bear #753 and her cub haven't yet harmed anyone, she shouldn't be killed. But the CDFW stay firm in their stance that if they see her, she will be euthanized.



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Eli Ramos is a reporter for Tahoe Daily Tribune. They are part of the 2024–26 cohort of California Local News Fellows through UC Berkeley.

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