

Campus police stress bicycle licensing, security

By Tricia Waters

Last year, 69 bicycles worth \$11,249 were stolen from UNL campuses. In the first six weeks of school this year, about 20 bikes were stolen, worth \$5,645.

UNL police started looking into the problem last year. They will begin a project this month to promote bicycle licensing, better security measures, awareness of bike theft problem and understanding of how bikes can be stolen.

Investigator Bob Fey and officers Mark Murphy and Dan McEntarffer have investigated the bike theft problem over the last several months. McEntarffer talked to bicycle dealers, and Fey and Murphy looked at the situation on campus.

Last spring on City Campus there were 1,000 bicycles in racks on an average weekday. Murphy said only 1 percent of those weren't secured and about 36 were licensed.

According to theft reports, the average cost of a bike on campus is \$134. The 1,000 bicycles thus are worth about \$134,000.

"We're starting to get a lot more bicycles on campus," Murphy said. "People are starting to invest a lot more money for their bikes. They are securing their bicycles. But the ways of securing them aren't good. They're using cheap, cheapy stuff."

McEntarffer said most bicycles that are stolen are locked.

Cheap locks

"What we're finding is they're spending \$200 on a bike and buying a \$6.98 cable," McEntarffer said. "There's no use putting a cheap lock on an expensive bike."

Murphy said thieves can cut through cable locks with vise grips or a pair of pliers in a matter of seconds.

McEntarffer said bicycle dealers recommend a U-shaped Citadel lock for bicycles. The lock can't be cut by boltcutters or hacksaws, he said. The lock costs \$20 to \$30.

Although the Citadel locks are more costly and less convenient than cable locks, the extra cost proves to be a good investment, McEntarffer said.

Police also recommend a 3/8-inch, case hardened chain and a 7/16-inch key-locking padlock, Murphy said. Depending on how much chain is bought, the locks cost about \$15 to \$20.

A 1/4-inch chain can be cut in six seconds and a cable can be cut in five seconds with a 24-inch pair of boltcutters, according to bicycle lock tests.

Murphy said people should check their bicycles every day if they are kept in one place for long, and report any suspicious people around bike racks.

Licensing deters

Because it takes only a few seconds to steal bicycles, police have a hard time catching a thief in the act, he said.

Murphy said licensing a bike seems to deter thieves.

"If there's a license on it, it's less likely to be stolen," Murphy said. "There's no real reason. Maybe they just don't want to pull off the sticker."

When a bicycle is licensed, a sticker is placed on it and a license number is engraved on the frame. The serial and license number are recorded by police and a copy of the license is given to the owner.

Not all bicycles have serial numbers, McEntarffer said. People should make sure their bicycles have some identification number marked on them, he said.

The numbers prove valuable when police recover a stolen bicycle and try to trace the owner. Without a license,

bicycles can seldom be traced back to their owners, McEntarffer said. Many bicycles end up on the auction block because they have no licenses and the owners can't be found, he said.

He said a bicycle worth more than \$150 can be entered in state and national computers as stolen property, but this requires entering the serial number in the computers.

"Of the 20 bikes stolen (since August), only five had serial numbers to be entered in the crime computer," McEntarffer said. The bicycles averaged \$225 apiece, he said.

Bicycle owners can get licenses, required by city ordinance, from UNL police and Lincoln police or fire departments. They cost \$1. The owner must present a bill of sale or proof of ownership.

Bicycle patrols

McEntarffer said bicycle dealers recommend that police or students form bicycle patrols to try to catch thieves. He said some universities have a bicycle club whose members ride their bikes in groups around campus.

If they see someone around bike racks who doesn't quite fit in or who has boltcutters, they report it, he said.

Murphy said he and Fey will give demonstrations to students on how easily a bicycle can be stolen, showing how ineffective cable locks are for security measures. They will also promote getting licenses.

"Bicycles are making a worthy target," Murphy said. "There are people around here who buy and steal bicycles for a living."

"Bicycles are getting hit probably worse than anything we've got right now," McEntarffer said. "A stolen bicycle is the most common report we get."



Photo by Dave Bentz

Bicycles found on UNL campuses are stored at campus police headquarters. Police said that bikes in this good of condition were more likely stolen than abandoned. Twenty bicycles have been stolen since the beginning of this semester.

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