

# Simple precautions can keep bikes out of criminal clutches

□ Criminals prey on those who do not keep their bikes under lock and key

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Emerald Contributor

University senior Maja Wolfe woke up to the voice of her alarmed roommate.

Her face paled as he bluntly informed her: "Our bikes are gone."

She rushed to the entrance room and saw one bike leaning against the couch. Two others were gone, and the front door was open.

"I felt really violated," Wolfe said. "It bothered me that someone came into the house while I was sleeping."

Wolfe had saved up for her bike for several months, and had finally purchased it a month ago. Now a complete stranger was breaking it in.

Today, with a new bike paid for partly by her insurance, Wolfe is extra-careful about protection.

"I kind of believe that everybody's going to steal it," Wolfe said. "I have two locks, and I always lock it to something. It takes me about 10 minutes just to lock and unlock my bike."

Wolfe isn't alone. Bike theft is rampant in Eugene.

Each month, nearly 100 bicycles are reported to the Eugene Public Safety Department as stolen, according to a recent department memorandum. That's 1,200 bikes per year.

Tim Birr, information director for the department, said perhaps 5 percent of all stolen bikes will be recovered.

The primary reason for the low recovery rate is that most owners don't know their serial number when they file a report. Birr advised bike buyers to keep the serial number and a thorough description of the bike on file in case it is stolen. Without this information, there

is very little chance of recovery.

Birr said the number of stolen bikes has remained relatively constant through the years, but the total value of stolen bikes has increased.

"Ten years ago, they were \$120 10-speeds," he said. "The average bicycle on the street today is a more expensive bike."

In 1991, \$400,000 worth of bicycles were reported stolen.

Birr said most stolen bikes are dismantled within minutes of being taken. A "new" bike is made out of the parts of several stolen ones. The bike is then sold on the street or to an unsuspecting second-hand dealer. A quick serial number check with police when buying a used bike will ensure that it has not been reported stolen.

Police receive the highest concentration of reports from the West University neighborhood, closely followed by campus and the downtown mall. However, "the whole city is one big glowing hot spot," Birr said.

Sara Happe, of Cycle-Bi Repairs & Cycles, said most bike thefts happen because of carelessness on the owner's part.

"They take things for granted, they were just gone for a second, or they locked the bike up overnight down on campus, that sort of thing," Happe said.

Happe suggested locking the bike in a well-lit area where there is plenty of pedestrian activity.

Bill Randleman of the Bicycle Service Center recommended using a "U-lock," such as Kryptonite, as a master lock. By running a separate cable through both wheels and into the lock, and then locking the bike's frame to a rack with the U-lock, the bike is as protected as possible.

"I've never seen anybody demonstrate having lost a bike with one of those U-locks properly locked," Randleman said.

Accessories such as pumps,

helmets and battery-operated lights are also tempting to bike thieves.

"Anything that isn't bolted on has to go with you," Randleman said. "You might get lucky, but it's eventually going to disappear when you need it."

Randleman recommended using a less-expensive bike for short trips.

"It's not necessary to ride your \$800 mountain bike to class," he said. "Most all enthusiasts have what they call their 'junkie' bike."

Marj Bigelow, a lieutenant with the University Office of Public Safety, pointed out that students are required to register their bicycles with OPS. The registration serves as a permit and can help provide officers with information if a bike is stolen.

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