Club recalls yellow bikes in an attempt to end theft

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VICIOUS CYCLE: Students have stolen bikes from the Yellow Bike Club by changing the combination of the locks or by repainting them, resulting in a recall of all of the yellow bikes.
The Yellow Bike Club (YBC) has recalled all of its bikes after an uncontrollable number of locks were tampered with. Leaders of the club collected the bikes around campus, cutting the lock in cases where the combination had been changed. The recall will allow the heads of the club to develop a better operating system that will prevent theft. The YBC owns 34 bikes around campus which members can access by obtaining the combination to all of the locks after paying a $15 membership fee.

President of the YBC Jon Viera '11 said they began to notice fewer bikes around campus about a week and a half into the school year.

"We had a lot of people call and e-mail saying that they were members and didn't have access to the bikes," Viera said.

Viera indicated that the biggest problem was students changing the combination on the bike so they could retain it. The issue climaxed after a yellow bike was spray-painted red near Brunswick Apartments, sparking an angry digest post from Aaron Cole '11, who said the culprit was guilty of stealing.

"It's clearly a yellow bike, because you can see the yellow on it," Cole said. "I'm not even sure they used it, because it just sat around, it was just wasted."

After YBC Secretary Jackie Su '12 and YBC Advisor Nancy Grant investigated the bike and determined it was one of the club's fleet, YBC leadership decided that the situation had gotten out of hand and initiated a total recall of the bikes. The club was able to recover 33 of the 34 bikes.

While they were still trying to figure out the details, Viera said that the club made plans to attach new key locks to all of the bikes and give members a key that will open every bike. The key, he said, will say "do not copy" on it so duplicates cannot be made.

Grant said that while this new system won't stop all non-members from riding the club's bikes, it will control the number of users at any one time.

"If you decide to give the key to your friend, your friend can ride the bike, but you can't," she said.

Grant said the club, which receives funding from the SAFC as well as through membership fees, had been conservative with its spending in the beginning of the semester and will not need to raise fees to instate the new plan.

Because the locks and keys will have to be ordered from a special company in order to obtain keys that could open any of the locks, it will take two to three weeks for the program to be re-launched, Grant said. As of Wednesday, the locks had not been ordered.

Members of the club were disgruntled with the way the bikes and the club had been treated.

"You're stealing bikes by changing combinations," Thompson Ogilvie '10, a two-year member, said. "As someone who paid $15 to be part of the club, I was pretty upset."

Ogilvie ultimately decided the hassle of either not finding a bike or not being able to unlock one was too much, and instead drove home to Hopedale, Mass. to bring his old bike to campus.

All of the members of the YBC whom the Orient spoke to said that originally, the program worked well.

"In the beginning I was really impressed," Jung Gun Song '11 said. "I was finding there were three or four bikes at hotspots around campus. So that was the reason why I wanted to join, because it was a viable alternative to actually buying a bike for myself."

Soon, Song said, finding bikes that were actually locked with the correct combination became a challenge.

"You almost always knew [when you walked up to it] because the yellow bike club combo was on there so you knew someone had already tried," he said.
One member, Adam Rasgon '13, said he has asked for a refund since the recall. Rasgon said that he has not heard back from the club, but Viera indicated that students that requested a refund would receive one in full.

Both Viera and Rasgon heard a rumor that the men’s lacrosse team was responsible for changing many of the combination locks, but did not know if there was any substance to that speculation.

Jimmy Herter ’11, a member of the men’s lacrosse team, said he was shocked when he heard about the rumor several days ago.

"Someone was talking about it the other day, we don't really know where that rumor came from, because I haven't see them at Crack House or any of the other apartments," he said. "I was pretty amazed, because I know no one [on the team] in our grade uses the bikes or knows the code."

Grant said the club was had hoped it would not have to turn to a key system, but that its hand has been forced. She also mentioned that the club would be considering making members place a deposit on keys, though details of the plan have yet to be worked out.

"We don't want to be in the business of managing keys, we want to be in the business of sharing bikes," she said.

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