Campus Police apply $50 roof fine

By Diana ben-Aaron

An upperclassman was fined $50 for illegally being on an MIT roof and several "hacking tours" for new students were apprehended last weekend, according to James Olivieri, chief of MIT Campus Police.

"I did not fine the freshmen who were with the upperclassman. Freshmen are generally confused, generally ignorant about this sort of thing," said Olivieri.

The Campus Police instituted a $50 fine for unauthorized presence on an MIT roof in December 1981 after Physical Plant brought reports of damage to roof-top structures and paths to the roofs to Olivieri's attention. Lock cylinders had been removed from doors, metal windowframes had been destroyed, experimental equipment had been damaged and stolen, and bottles and cans had been thrown down laboratory ventilation outlets, Olivieri explained.

"The impact on the budget run to the tens of thousands of dollars, and I am not using those numbers lightly," Olivieri said. The $50 fine goes to the Physical Plant Maintenance Department, where it helps cover the damage caused to roofs in the course of the year. "Of course, we do not recover anywhere near the cost of all the damage through fines," Olivieri emphasized.

Damage reports have decreased from 60 or 70 incidents per year to 30 incidents in 1982, according to Olivieri. In 1982, ten students were fined.

Olivieri also expressed concern about the safety of students on roofs. "The roofs were not made for prowling around on," he said. "Except for graffiti in the tombs [basement areas], I've never heard of any damage," one leader of freshman "hacking" tours said. "We don't break doors or locks -- if we can't get through easily, we don't bother.

The most destructive thing we do is temporarily and reversibly disabling electronic alarm systems. We make a point, especially to new freshmen, that we're not thieves. We don't want to hurt anyone or anything."

"We go out of our way to assure freshman safety," the tour leader said. "We always have five or ten people who've done it before on each tour, we have plans for injury, and we give a brief but pleasant talk beforehand." The upperclassman post guards near particular dangers like glass skylights, he said.

The leader said he knew of only one injury in over six years of hacking tours. "A girl cut her hand, not seriously, on some glass. We took her to the Infirmary," he said.

"There are some hackers who are non-destructive, quite technical, quite efficient," Olivieri said. "And then there are those blunderers who have no concern for damage when they're going from one place to another. They are making it more difficult for the first group.

Another tour guide said his group "does not destroy anything in roofs and tunnels. We try to get where we're going with a minimum of damage, and that includes avoiding scratch marks on the paint." He said he knew of about ten freshmen whose ID's had been taken by Campus Police but returned the next morning with no fine or penalty beyond a lecture and warning. Campus Police had stopped two tours of which he knew, the first leader said. On one, names of freshmen had been taken; the other ended in the upperclassman's "tour guide, being fined. "We are taking up a collection to help him pay the fine because so many of us were in it together," he continued.

"Sometimes a student will call me up and say, 'Another great MIT tradition down the drain,'" Olivieri said. "I did not fine the freshmen who were with the upperclassman. Freshmen are generally confused, generally ignorant about this sort of thing," said Olivieri.

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