Bike thefts rise sharply; experts may be to blame

By Thomas T. Hwang

A professional ring of thieves preying on local college campuses could be the source of a sharp rise in bicycle thefts at MIT, according to MIT Campus Police Chief James Olivieri. He believes that the thieves traveled from campus to campus, stealing the bicycles and transporting them by van to sell them to a middleman.

It was in reading the daily police reports a few weeks ago that Olivieri first noticed something was amiss. Bicycles — mostly expensive, high-quality bicycles, were being stolen every two or three days from the campus.

Spurred by the rise in thefts, Olivieri and Captain Anne P. Glavin started digging through the statistics. Those statistics reveal that the number of bicycle thefts on campus has almost doubled in the past year. In the first six months of 1986, 25 bicycles were stolen. In the same period for 1987, 46 bicycles were stolen.

To make matters worse, the perpetrators are handpicking expensive, high-quality bicycles, breaking the Kryptonite and Citadel locks that secure the bicycles.

"We believe," said Olivieri, "that they are using freon to freeze the locks, and then breaking the Kryptonite and Citadel locks that secure the bicycles.

Olivieri consulted with police officials at Boston University and Harvard University and found that they were experiencing a similar rise in thefts. It was the Boston University police who first tipped him off that a professional group may be at work here.

Meanwhile, Harvard officials said that in the last two months thieves had stolen a large number of new bicycles from the campus and put old, battered bicycles in their place.

As MIT, a large number of the bicycles parked in the Student Center area (16) and Amherst Alley (10) have been stolen, but no definite pattern has been established, Glavin said.

"As the thieves can now break through locks that were once thought safe, Olivieri and Glavin were hard put to suggest what students can do to prevent thefts," Glavin said.

"They suggested that students should not buy bicycles of a caliber higher than that which they really need.

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