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A graveyard of Google bikes

Company bikes winding up in the creek

by Mark Noack

It's just one of the many perks of working at Google — employees can take their pick from about 1,000 brightly colored bicycles to joyride around Mountain View. But the famous Google bike program has an ongoing problem that spikes in the warm summer months when a large number of its fleet goes missing.

Like supermarket shopping carts, the Google bikes have a tendency to wind up far off-site, and they're often swiped by people who aren't supposed to be using them.

Exactly who's taking the bikes is anyone's guess, but residents in Mountain View's North Whisman neighborhood have apparently solved the mystery of where many of these two-wheelers are ending up. Every week recently, a few more multicolored Google bikes have been found in the soggy muck of Stevens Creek. And those junked bikes are quickly becoming an eyesore, said local resident Steven Chandler. He and other residents have been pressing the company to do more to clean up the creek by retrieving its lost bikes.

"It just seems wrong that we have someone who is so wealthy that they have these throwaway bicycles," he said. "It feels like Google is too high up to go down and pull their bikes up."

The bike problem was on full display about a week ago along the Stevens Creek Trail near Whisman Park. Within a quarter-mile stretch, there were at least 13 bikes down in the creek bed. Some were covered in algae and sun-bleached, indicating they had been there for no short amount of time.

In recent days, members of the Friends of Stevens Creek Trail have been working to fish out the bikes on their own. Executive Director Aaron Grossman said he recovered six bikes over the weekend along the trail near Evelyn Road.

As a fan of the Google bike program, he lamented that someone seemed to be dumping the bikes so thoughtlessly. He couldn't recall Google bikes ever winding up in the creek before recent times.

"This is an annoyance and a real concern for us," Grossman said. "Years ago people used to toss industrial waste into the creek. Bikes by comparison are pretty mild, but it's still inappropriate."

In an email to the *Voice*, Google officials admitted that the problem with stolen bikes has gotten worse this year, but they declined to provide exact numbers.

Representatives from Google say the company's bicycles all have posted warnings stating that they're intended for employees only. These instructions also state where they should be parked as well as the phone number for security, according to a company spokesperson.

Google has a retrieval team that patrols the campus and surrounding neighborhoods daily to find missing bikes.

In the face of the recent problems, Google officials reported they're considering ways to reduce

their bike loss, possibly through hiring more employees and adding GPS-tracking devices to each bicycle.

Google officials encourage anyone who spots a missing company bike to contact lostgbike@google.com or call 650-253-5353.

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