



AFAC offices

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## AFAC (Amsterdam Bicycle Processing Centre)

### General Description:

AFAC processes bicycles that have been removed by urban district councils in Amsterdam (abandoned or badly parked bicycles). Cycling is such an established part of transport culture in Holland that the "broken bike effect" is an issue that warrants concerted response. Councils remove inappropriately parked, abandoned and damaged bikes because they:

- take up cycle parking spaces that are needed to accommodate cycles in use
- communicate to other cyclists that the bike park is not well cared for and thus invite more misuse and abuse, including vandalism and theft
- cause inconvenience to non-cycling members of the public via obstruction
- detract from visual appeal of the public realm by creating visual clutter



Processed Bicycles are parked within the compound to await collection

### Location of Facility:

About 30 minutes from Amsterdam, at Bornhout 8, on the A10 ringroad.

### Provider:

The city of Amsterdam (the Department of Infrastructure, Traffic & Transport) is owner of the AFAC.

### Designer / Architect:

There was no architect or designer involved. The building and its surroundings are owned by the city of Amsterdam and were available for conversion.

### Cost of Provision:

AFAC opened on May 1st 2003. The cost of the facility at this moment (Jan 2008) is as follows:

Rent of building (total 1590 m<sup>2</sup>) and terrain (6940 m<sup>2</sup>) (gas, light, etc. included): €160.000

Employees: €300.000

Other costs: €50.000

Subtotal: €510.000

Revenues (auction, €10 fee): - €70.000

Total costs: €440.000

Of course this sum must be considered relative to the average of 12000 bikes at the AFAC. In other cities, like Zwolle, the AFAC costs are much less and the amount of space et cetera, is much smaller.



Each bike is given a unique number

### Further Details about the AFAC scheme:

AFAC reunites bikes with their owners and implements a registration scheme that makes it harder for bike thieves to operate, and easy for owners to identify their own bikes. AFAC runs a complex system of checks that occur once a bike has been despatched to the Centre. They find out whether the bike has been reported lost or stolen (stolen bikes are returned free of charge to owners); and whether the bike is known to AFAC and carries an AFAC registration number (engraved into the seat tube of the frame).

Bike owners can come to AFAC to collect their bike, if they can prove it's theirs by presenting the key that matches and can unlock the lock on the bike. They also have to identify themselves; this is also registered in the database. If the bike is proven to be theirs, it can be returned to its owner for a fee of €10. If requested the bike can be dropped anywhere in Amsterdam for €10 extra. All bikes arriving at AFAC are given a unique AFAC identifying number on a sticker that is attached at the handlebar. This number and all identifying features of the bike are recorded on AFAC's automated system.



AFAC registration number



Numbers are always engraved on the seat tube. An orange sticker is applied to ensure the registration is clearly visible.



A bike arrives for processing

The system allows the bike to be searched for under any of the features entered. These features include colour, make, model, frame number, accessories and customisations.



Bikes for auction in lots



Unique numbers are created as a steel stencil



Bikes for donation to charity

Once registered, each bike is engraved with its unique AFAC registration number. The engraving is always made on the seat tube of the frame. This consistency makes checking for AFAC registration quicker and easier. Negotiations initiated by AFAC with Dutch cycle manufacturers have resulted in several manufacturers marking bikes using the same coding and system (AFAC registrations always start 'AF' and those made for bikes manufactured by Batavus always start 'BA'). Part of this coding system is also that the codes are put on the same 3 places on every new bike (in between the triangle around the crank axle). Of course this makes it easier to look for stolen bikes, because the frame numbers are always on the same spot. The code came into use from summer 2006. This willingness to register uniformly is of great benefit to the efficiency of the system (frame codes are diverse can conflict – i.e. same number from two different

manufacturers – and cause confusion. The uniform system introduced by AFAC aids proof of ownership and crime prevention.



Bikes to be destroyed

On average there are 12000 bikes at the AFAC. 30-40% of these bikes are collected by their owners. The bikes will be kept for a statutory period of 3 months, and if unclaimed will then be sorted into one of 3 groups: (a) bikes to be destroyed as they are not fit for use (30 %); (b) bikes to be resold to officially recognised second hand bike dealers (35%); and (c) bikes that may be given to charitable initiatives, if it is clear that the initiative can repair and maintain the bikes to make appropriate use of the gift (35%).

Using this method of 'capture, tag and return' AFAC are gradually achieving registration of Amsterdam's cycle population leading to improved vehicle management and security. From May 2003 until 1 December 2007 AFAC have managed to register over 134000 bikes (100000 at AFAC, 34000 bikes by the engraving team on the streets), 25% of Amsterdam's 520000 strong cycle population.

### Security:

The facility is open 8 – 4.30 pm weekdays and 9 – 12.30 pm on Saturdays. Currently registered bikes are stored outdoors enclosed by a perimeter fence some 2 metres high. Unregistered bikes are stored indoors within the processing areas. There is no CCTV surveillance of the facility. Security is primarily provided by its location and staffing. However, this isolated location is itself a 'troublesome trade-off'. Whilst it ensures opportunist thieves are unlikely, those targeting the facility at night when it is un-staffed have managed to breach the perimeter and steal bikes. There is some benefit in the fact that those bikes vulnerable to theft are AFAC registered and therefore more easily detectable.



There it is! A relieved cyclist is reunited with his bike.

The organisation of bikes in the outdoor storage compound is efficient and simple, organised into A-Z category areas, organised by bicycle brand. Those cyclists retrieving bikes usually find it easy to identify their cycle via AFAC's computer records, which also indicate where in the compound they are located.

When retrieving bikes Cyclists are asked to present strong proof of ownership such as a purchase receipt for their bike, or failing that a key to release the inbuilt lock present on many Dutch bikes (Dutch bikes usually have an inbuilt lock component attached to bike when it is purchased) or the chain locks. On top of that, a proof of identity and residence is obliged. A strong description of the bike noting distinguishing features helps to find the bike quicker in the system. Unfortunately, most of the bike owners cannot describe their own bike properly. Because of all the features that are registered at the arrival of the bike, there are only a few people disappointed at the AFAC. They cannot trace their bike, or it's really not there.

The AFAC system is designed not just to remove bikes but also to build cycle security in Amsterdam and surrounding areas, so that stolen bikes are returned to owners and that abandoned bikes are not allowed to occupy parking space, and broken bikes are not allowed to make the area feel run down and unsafe.

The people that have collected their bikes successfully are presented with a record of all the distinguishing features the AFAC has found on their bikes (registration number, frame number, make, model etc). They are encouraged to keep these details in a safe place.

### **Furniture:**

There is no furniture to store bikes other than scaffold poles arranged horizontally against which bikes are rested. Trolleys are used to transport locked bikes from the processing and engraving bays to the storage compound. Marking of bikes with AFAC registration numbers is carried out using engraving equipment and metal stencils to ensure uniformity. The engraved numbers are highlighted by framing them with fluorescent orange adhesive stickers. These stickers protect the

bike from rusting (when you engrave a bike, you take away the protecting layer). That's why after engraving, a bit of white chalking powder is put in the engraving groove and then it is covered with a sticker. These stickers act also as overt messaging to thieves and indicate where the registration number is to be found.



Scaffold poles provide parking furniture.

The bike parking compound was full the day we viewed it and 90% of the bikes appear to be standing up using the integrated kick stands common to Dutch bikes.

### Scale (Capacity):

On average 12000 bicycles at any one time.

### Length of Stay:

Bikes are held for up to 3 months after which they are disposed of as described above.

### Organisation and Charges:

The AFAC is not a beautiful centre and very out of the way to get to, but the system that organizes AFAC really is beautiful; it is pragmatic, efficient and well considered. Some of its staffing is managed using funds available to the Council for giving drug and other offenders opportunities to return to work in the community. 30–40% of impounded bikes are returned to their owners. An€10 payment is required to retrieve the bike. Additionally, revenues are generated by auction of unclaimed bikes.

### Strengths:

It was recognised that bicycle theft and use needed to be managed more efficiently in Amsterdam. An integrated system which registers and manages cycle parking within the city enables the authorities to do so in a fair and controlled manner. In addition to registration of all the bikes processed within the AFAC compound (134000 so far) teams



from AFAC are regularly sent out around Amsterdam to engrave bikes with registration numbers, for free.

Working in partnership with a number of different parties, and designed in conjunction with the police, AFAC has done its best to respond to bicycle crime by identifying stolen bikes and reuniting them with their owners where possible, and investigating and relocating abandoned bikes in a responsible and responsive manner. Because the AFAC has access to the stolen bikes reports, it is possible that they will find your bike for *you*. Of course, you have to make a theft report. Also the engraving teams on the street actively check the bikes for bike theft, before engraving the AFAC code (they have a database of the stolen reports on a notebook).

The Centre also works closely with the second hand bicycle trade to discourage the handling of stolen bikes and to make sure that the AFAC registration system helps make life harder for thieves. AFAC also promotes cycle security initiatives, and has delivered many communications via local TV and poster campaigns.

### **Weaknesses:**

The journey to the AFAC compound and €10 retrieval fee may put off owners of old bikes that have been removed from claiming them back.

The facility matches the need of space and capacity, but is badly located outside the city and access is difficult, for most..

### **Useful References:**

<http://www.afac.amsterdam.nl/>