

NEWS RELEASE

Steven T. Marshall
Alabama Attorney General



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 23, 2017

For More Information, contact:
Mike Lewis (334) 353-2199
Joy Patterson (334) 242-7491
Page 1 of 3

TWO INDIVIDUALS CHARGED FOR A GAS STATION DEBIT CARD SKIMMING OPERATION THAT INVOLVED MULTIPLE STATES

(MONTGOMERY)--Two individuals are facing federal charges for using skimming devices on gas pumps, announced George Beck Jr., U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, and Steven T. Marshall, Attorney General for the State of Alabama. These charges are the result of a continuing multi-agency investigation that was initiated by the Alabama Attorney General's Office, the Ozark Police Department, the United States Secret Service and the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office. On February 15, 2017, Eunises-Llorca Menses (30), of Naples, Florida, and Reiner Perez-Rives (34), of Houston, Texas, were charged by a federal grand jury with conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud and aggravated identity theft.

According to court documents, Llorca-Menses and Perez-Rives were involved in a multi-state scheme to defraud individuals and steal bank and credit union account information from unsuspecting individuals by installing a skimming device at gas stations. A skimming device can be installed on a gas pump and record a customer's credit/debit card number and pin number without the customer's knowledge or consent.

As part of their scheme, they would rent vehicles and travel between Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and Virginia. During their travels, they would visit several gas stations and install a skimming device inside a gas pump. Through the skimming device, they collected gas station customers' credit/debit card information and used that information to activate or reactivate credit, debit, or gift cards, and make unauthorized cash withdrawals and purchases at several places around the southeast.

--more--



Law enforcement was able to uncover this scheme following multiple reports from victims concerning the unauthorized use of their debit cards. Working with financial institutions, the Ozark Police Department, along with state and federal partners, discovered that many of the victims had used their cards at the same gas station in Ozark, Alabama. At this station they found a skimming device installed on a gas pump that had Bluetooth capability. The Bluetooth technology allowed the defendants to collect a gas customer's credit/debit information while sitting up to thirty-feet away from the gas pump.

Upon arrest, the two were found to be in possession of a total of thirty-nine credit/debit cards that had been re-encoded with stolen credit/debit card numbers, along with an additional 315 various types of gift cards. Law enforcement also found a homemade device with connectors that matched the connections on the skimming device found in the gas pump in Ozark, Alabama.

An indictment merely alleges that crimes have been committed. The defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. If convicted, each faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison and payment of restitution to their victims.

"Criminals are constantly coming up with sophisticated ways to deprive us of our hard earned money," stated U.S. Attorney Beck. "They always try to stay one step ahead of law enforcement. Banks, gas stations, retail businesses, and customers, need to be ever watchful for this type of criminal activity and report it to the authorities immediately. I would like to thank all the agencies involved for acting quickly to recognize this scheme and identify those responsible."

"I want to thank U.S. Attorney Beck for taking swift action to bring federal charges against suspects identified in late December by state and local authorities in a wide-ranging crime spree of identity thefts committed through debit card skimming at gasoline pumps," said Attorney General Steven T. Marshall. "I am extremely proud of the outstanding investigation by Special Agents in the Attorney General's Office, along with the Ozark Police Department and Baldwin County Sheriff's Office, to uncover these illegal activities and arrest the defendants on state charges which are pending. This kind of support and cooperative teamwork among law enforcement agencies from the local to the federal level is vital for us to be effective in shutting down criminal operations."

--more--

“I am proud that our department was able to play a role in this investigation,” stated Ozark Police Chief Marlos Walker. “I am always excited and pleased with the support we have from our state and federal partners. Cooperation among law enforcement is essential in stopping these types of operations.”

“The U.S. Secret Service has seen a rise in cases involving gas pump skimmers nationwide,” stated Resident Agent in Charge Clayton Slay, U.S. Secret Service in Montgomery, Alabama. “This is partly due to the incremental conversion of all credit card point of sale processors from the use of the magnetic strip to the new EMV ‘Chip’ technology. As retail businesses make the transition to EMV, criminals are targeting those business that have not made the change. This includes credit card readers on gas pumps. The Secret Service, along with local and state law enforcement authorities, continue to be proactive in these type of crimes through information sharing with financial institutions, credit card issuing companies, and education of members of the petroleum distribution industry.”

“Criminals can breach the gas pump and install a skimming device which can be there for weeks or months before crooks return to download the credit card and PIN numbers, if used,” continued RAC Slay. “Some skimming devices, like the ones used in this case, are Bluetooth enabled so the crooks don’t even have to breach the pump again to download the information from the skimmer. The skimming devices are usually not detectable from the outside of the pump and are typically only detected when the pump is opened or serviced for any reason.”

Slay advises that the public should monitor their bank and credit card accounts frequently and report any unusual activity to those financial institutions. Another way to possibly prevent this type of fraud is to pay inside the store or use pumps that are visible to store employees and any video surveillance cameras, as criminals normally target pumps that allow them to install skimming devices undetected.

This case was a joint investigation involving the Ozark Police Department, the Alabama Attorney General’s office, the United States Secret Service, and the Baldwin County Sheriff’s Office. This case is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Alabama by Assistant United States Attorney Denise O. Simpson.