



# NEWS RELEASE

## HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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### **Police issue warning about skimmers at gas pumps**

*Two men charged with installing skimming device at gas station*

After charging two men with installing a skimming device inside a gas pump in Ellicott City, Howard County police are warning drivers and station owners to be aware of this crime.

Skimmers are hidden illegal card readers attached to ATMs and gas pumps, often inside the cabinet, that take data from a credit or debit card, including PIN numbers. Criminals sell the stolen data or use it to drain bank accounts. Consumers typically don't know their information has been stolen until they get their bank statements or an overdraft notice. Skimmer technology has made the devices smaller and harder to find, especially when they are hidden inside a gas pump.

Last week, Howard County police charged two Miami, Fla., men, Mario Eduardo Castro Ramirez, 51, and Frank Alvarez Rodriguez, 29, with possession of a skimming device and counterfeit credit card materials. The men were spotted by an employee at the Exxon gas station in the 4200 block of Montgomery Road placing a device inside a pump on Aug. 9. These were the fifth and sixth skimming arrests in Howard County so far this year. Ramirez was released on \$5,000 bond and Rodriguez was released on \$25,000 bond.

To date in 2017, police have investigated 19 skimming cases in Howard County, which resulted in the recovery of nearly 30 devices. In the four previous arrests, investigators tracked suspects to hotel rooms, where they found skimming devices and counterfeit materials. In most skimming cases, suspects are part of a much larger network committing similar crimes throughout the U.S.

Police have been visiting local gas stations and other businesses to educate employees about skimming and urge them to look for suspicious activity and check their pumps every day. Investigators are also encouraging station owners to put security seals over the cabinet panels on their gas pumps. While this is a voluntary decision by each station owner, it gives drivers an indication if the panel has been opened or tampered with.

Detectives are reminding drivers to look for anything suspicious at the gas pump and follow these tips:

- Look for signs of tampering: If there is a security seal over the cabinet panel, is it damaged? Is the card scanner or keypad loose or crooked?
- Choose a pump within view of the gas station attendant.
- If you use a debit card at the pump, run it as a credit card instead of entering a PIN. That way, if your card is compromised, the money isn't deducted immediately from your account.
- Consider paying for your gas inside the station or kiosk.
- If you discover fraudulent activity on your card, contact your bank immediately, then call police.

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Howard County Police Department  
Skimming Devices  
Aug. 18, 2017

Howard County police have recovered skimming devices in the following cases in 2017:

Jan. 16	Shell	6200 block of Washington Blvd., Elkridge
Jan. 23	BP	5800 block Washington Blvd., Laurel
Feb. 4	Hess	6300 block of Washington Blvd., Elkridge
March 1	Sleep Inn*	10100 North 2 <sup>nd</sup> Street, Laurel
March 2	Exxon	8200 block of Snowden River Pkwy., Columbia
April 29	Tower FCU (ATM)	9000 block of Snowden River Pkwy., Columbia
May 2	Exxon	8800 block of Centre Park Dr., Columbia
May 17	Exxon	8800 block of Centre Park Dr., Columbia
May 24	Turf Valley Hotel*	2700 block of Turf Valley Rd., Ellicott City
June 9	Exxon	4200 block of Montgomery Rd., Ellicott City
June 12	Exxon	8300 block of Benson Dr., Columbia
June 26	Exxon	8200 block of Snowden River Pkwy., Columbia
July 15	Exxon	10100 block of Little Patuxent Pkwy., Columbia
July 19	Exxon (ATM)	7300 block of Washington Blvd., Elkridge
Aug. 2 (two reports)	Exxon	8800 block of Centre Park Dr., Columbia
Aug. 10	Exxon	4200 block of Montgomery Rd., Ellicott City
Aug. 12 (two reports)	Exxon	4200 block of Montgomery Rd., Ellicott City

*\*Devices located in hotel room; none found on ATMs on-site.*

For additional information about skimmers from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), visit <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/avoid-skimmers-pump>.

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