



Office Phone: 513-887-3154
Office Fax: 513-887-3149

130 High Street
Hamilton, Ohio 45011



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Skimmer Summit Shines Light on Credit Card Theft

Auditor Reynolds and Auditor Keith Team Up for Event

HAMILTON, Ohio – Illegally placing credit card skimmers inside fuel dispensers at gas stations to rob consumers of their credit card information has become a growing problem. Within the past few months skimmers have been found in at least seven Ohio counties and at three Butler County gas stations.

Using credit and debit cards at the pumps has become more risky as this crime grows in popularity. Experts say one skimmer can bring a return of tens of thousands of dollars.

In order to share information and raise awareness of this increasing concern, the Butler County Auditor's Office, in tandem with the Montgomery County Auditor's Office, hosted a "Skimmer Summit" on May 18 at the Ohio State University Extension office in Hamilton.

Butler County Auditor Roger Reynolds was joined by Montgomery County Auditor Karl Keith, Ohio State Trooper Frank Applegate and Butler County Chief Weights and Measures Inspector Tom Kamphaus. Applegate is assigned to the Ohio Financial Crimes Task Force of the Secret Service. Gas station owners, store managers, police, the general public and media attended the summit.

The event offered an opportunity to increase awareness of this growing problem and share best practices in an effort to help prevent consumers from falling prey to this form of theft.

Even though the Auditor's Office performs spot checks for skimmers at county stations, there are only two inspectors on staff. Reynolds said a more effective measure would be for gas station employees, managers and owners to inspect their own pumps each time they open them to replace receipt tape, which can be up to a couple of times a day in high traffic areas.

As a result of the information shared at the summit, a local Walmart manager who attended suggested that area Walmart managers check their self-checkout credit card scanners to see if any had been tampered with. It turns out that skimmers were found inside at least three stores on Wednesday and Thursday – two in Hamilton County and one in Northern Kentucky.

A false front had been placed over the store's credit card slot in each instance to steal information.

Applegate suggested at the summit that consumers and store employees jiggle the slots where credit cards are placed as a safeguard from tampering.

Tips for Stations

- Activity at gas stations should be closely and securely monitored by station managers and attendants.
- Gas pumps should be opened up and the internal mechanisms examined regularly by station staff.
- The most effective way to stop these scams is to install better, more secure locks on every pump. Better locks will prohibit unauthorized access to a gas pump's interior components.

Tips for Consumers

- NEVER use a debit card when paying for gas at the pump. Thieves can steal PIN numbers.
- Report any unusual activity or anything that looks out of place.
- Monitor monthly bank and credit card statements for fraudulent charges.
- Use cash to pay for purchases whenever possible.
- If you believe you have been a victim of a skimmer scam, notify local law enforcement and your credit card issuer immediately.



A skimmer found inside a gas pump in West Chester Township in 2015.



A skimmer found inside a Hamilton County Walmart. This false front was at a self checkout.