

BBB[®] warns consumers: protect your debit and credit cards from skimming

1 in 5 individuals estimated to be victims of skimming thefts

Pensacola, Fla. (Nov. 3, 2010) – ATM skimming – stealing the information from a debit or credit card's magnetic strip – is a growing problem. According to Bankrate.com, ATM skimmers are close to reaping \$1 billion annually and Javelin Strategy & Research estimates that one in five people have become victims. Your Better Business Bureau recommends consumers take steps to protect themselves.

Thieves tamper with ATMs in a number of ways to steal card numbers and PINs. It only takes a few seconds to install cameras over the keypad or a device over the card reader. And ATMs aren't the only hotspots: card swipers at gas pumps and retailers can be compromised as well. And whereas criminals used to have to return for the equipment to harvest the skimmed numbers, they now can have the information sent wirelessly.

"Skimming devices are becoming increasingly harder to detect," said Norman Wright, president and CEO of your BBB|Northwest Florida. "It's important to be aware of your surroundings and to monitor your accounts closely so you can quickly detect and report any fraudulent activity."

To fight identity thieves, your BBB recommends:

Protecting your PIN: When entering your PIN, cover the keypad to prevent any cameras from catching your digits. Be on the lookout for false keypads placed over the real keypad to capture your PIN; if it looks different, move on.

Give it a wiggle: Skimming devices are often false panels attached to the card reader. If the ATM or swiper looks damaged or different, give it a wiggle. Also look for new or suspiciously placed cameras and unusual signage. Don't hesitate to walk away if something doesn't feel right.

Choose wisely: Avoid ATMs in poorly-lit or low-trafficked areas. Experts often recommend choosing a bank ATM over standalone ATMs in public places. Not only do identity thieves attach devices to legitimate ATMs but they may also place their own phony ATMs in public places.

Watch your statements: Even the most vigilant person can fall victim to skimmers; keep a close eye on your accounts so you can quickly report suspicious activity.

Report fraud immediately: Consumer protections depend largely on when you report the fraudulent activity. If you wait too long to report the fraud, your account could be cleaned out and your bank might not reimburse you.

For additional information and advice you can trust on protecting yourself against identity theft, start with bbb.org.