



SMALL STORE OWNER SKIMS CREDIT/DEBIT CARD NUMBERS

The owner of a tobacco shop in Redmond, Washington was sentenced to 33 months for skimming credit cards.

Hrant "Mike" Aslanyan pleaded guilty to skimming the numbers of debit and credit numbers of more than 300 of his store's customers. He used the numbers to steal money and incur extra charges from more than 15 different banks.

U.S. District Judge Ricardo S. Martinez said at his sentencing, "This type of crime victimizes totally innocent people who are just going about their daily business.

From 2004 to early 2006, dozens of people had reported use of their credit cards, without their permission, to withdraw money in the Las Vegas and Los Angeles areas.

The victims had initially used their card at Aslanyan's tobacco store, "Smoker's Choice." More than thirty of the victims were able to identify Aslanyan as the person who ran their card.

The police were unable to recover the skimmer, the device that records the credit and debit card information.

Assistant United States Attorney Vince Lombardi said "It is difficult to overstate the feeling of victimization felt by individuals who find their identity and account information stolen, merely because they chose entrust [Aslanyan] with their debit or credit card when buying cigarettes or other items. Identity theft and related fraud crimes have been an epidemic in this judicial district... this particular crime impacted hundreds of individuals."

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