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Task Force Busts Alleged Credit Card Skimming Ring

After four rigorous years, investigators say they have broken up an alleged organized crime ring of credit card skimmers who stole from tens of thousands of credit card holders all over [California](#).

In an alleged scheme that affected more than 40,000 victims at more than 60 gas stations in the San Fernando Valley, and resulted in losses of roughly \$4.5 million, it's no wonder authorities are calling it one of the biggest busts of an identity theft ring in Southern California history.

In exclusive video given to NBCLA by the [FBI](#), the man authorities are calling the "kingpin" of the operation, 39-year-old [Albert Gonzalez](#), looks like any other suburban man just leaving home, picking up his co-worker on his way to work, and stopping at the ATM to pick up some cash. Problem is, it's not his money, say investigators. In fact, if you live in Los Angeles and your credit card information was stolen in the last year, it could have been yours.

The High-Tech Crimes Task Force assigned to the investigation, members consisting of the FBI and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, spent the last four years trying to bust the prolific credit card skimming ring, but needed hard evidence to do so.

"We had to get video. We had to try and catch them in the act because (with) identity theft, they hide in the shadows; they are ghosts. They are very hard to convict because you never see them, or they are always somebody else," said LA County Sheriff Detective Duane Decker.

And catch them they did. Over the last three years, the Southern California High-Tech Task Force arrested 12 men allegedly related to the crimes. In February of this year, they arrested three men -- 42-year-old [Josue Albizuras](#), 28-year-old [Cesar Echevarria](#), and 39-year-old Albert Gonzalez -- all of whom were allegedly involved in what the Task Force calls "Operation Big Skim."

"With all 12, they all had different components of this type of identity theft, whether it was the skimmers at the pump or credit card making," Decker said.

The ring allegedly ripped off drivers at dozens of gas stations in LA and the Valley. Investigators said the ring broke into gas pumps and installed wireless skimmers to copy credit and debit cards used to buy gas.

The stolen information -- including the card number, zip code and even the pin number -- is harvested in laptop computers and then downloaded using Bluetooth in an encrypted format, according to the FBI.

"The technology over the last three or four years has advanced to the point where there's Bluetooth technology that they put inside the gas pump and they're able to never have to even go back inside; they can just offload the information right into the laptop," said Decker.