

Brazilian couple indicted in ATM Skimming Scheme in Massachusetts

A Brazilian couple was indicted in federal court in Boston in connection with an ATM skimming operation.

Alexandre Kawamura, 42, was indicted today on two counts of using a counterfeit access device, four counts of possessing device-making equipment, and two counts of aggravated identity theft. On April 12, Karem Kawamura, 25, was indicted on one count of aiding and abetting the use of a counterfeit access device. The Kawamuras were charged by complaint on March 30, 2018, and are both currently in custody.

According to the complaint affidavits, the ATM skimming equipment consisted of devices attached to ATM card slots that recorded bank account information on the magnetic strips of debit cards that unwitting victims inserted into ATMs, combined with pinhole cameras that captured the victims entering their PINs on ATM keypads. Alexandre Kawamura was caught on ATM security video placing and removing skimming devices on drive-up ATMs at Eastern Bank branches in Saugus, Stoneham, and Medford between Feb. 24 and March 16, 2018. On two occasions, when he drove up to the ATMs to check on the devices, Karen Kawamura was in the car.

On March 16, 2018, a bank customer called local police to report that he had found and removed a skimming device from the drive-up ATM at the Eastern Bank branch in Stoneham. Police responded and discovered that the pinhole camera was still attached to the ATM. They set up surveillance while bank security personnel monitored the ATM's security video, and shortly before 11 pm, Alexandre Kawamura drove up to the ATM in a rental car, looked around for the skimming device, never

inserted a card into the machine, and then drove off. Stoneham Police stopped Alexandre Kawamura's car shortly thereafter. Mr. Kawamura had a Brazilian passport in his true name, but had rented the vehicle under an alias.

The same alias was embossed on a credit card in Alexandre Kawamura's possession when he was arrested, but the bank account information contained in the magnetic strip of the card belonged to a bank customer whose debit card had been compromised at one of the Eastern Bank ATMs the day before. Eastern Bank records showed that, on the day of Mr. Kawamura's arrest, purchases were made on the bank customer's account at Dick's Sporting Goods in Medford. The store's security camera recorded the defendants shopping at that store during the time when the bank customer's account was used to buy a shirt, jacket, and hat.

After Mr. Kawamura was arrested, federal agents located Ms. Kawamura at an Extended Stay America in Woburn. On March 30, agents executed a search warrant for the room used by Ms. Kawamura and found the shirt, jacket, and hat that had been purchased at Dick's Sporting Goods.

The charge of using a counterfeit access device provides for a sentence of no greater than 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of possession of device-making equipment provides for a sentence of no greater than 15 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of aggravated identity theft provides for a mandatory sentence of two years in prison, to run concurrently with any other sentence imposed, up to one year of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of aiding and abetting the use of a counterfeit access device provides for a sentence of no greater than 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling; Harold H. Shaw, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Field Office; Medford Police Chief Leo Sacco; Milton Police Chief John E. King; Saugus Police Chief Domenic J. DiMella; Stoneham Police Chief James T. McIntyre; and Woburn Police Chief Robert J. Ferullo Jr. made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorney Christine Wichers of Lelling's Major Crimes Unit is prosecuting the case.

The details contained in the indictments are allegations. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.