



Contributed photo

This photo from the Richland Police Department shows an example of a credit card skimmer (right) that can be attached to a card reader to steal information.

ATM: Believed to be the work of an organized ring of criminals

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The device looks like an extension of the card reader, but instead intercepts debit and credit card information that thieves can later collect and use to their advantage. Edmiston said it appears in this case the information is being used to manufacture fake debit cards that are then used to withdraw cash from other ATMs.

Police believe the crimes are the work of an organized ring of criminals.

"This is a fairly sophisticated operation, which would lead us to believe it is also fairly organized," Edmiston said.

He said Hermiston detectives have been exchanging information with other jurisdictions, including Portland and the Tri-Cities, to work together to bust the crime ring, which appears to be hitting cities across in the northwest.

Richland police recently arrested two people caught stealing card information from a self-pay gasoline pump, but the suspects did not match the description of the suspect in the Hermiston fraud.

Edmiston said if anyone notices a suspicious device on an ATM they should alert the bank or the police. He said the reports of fraud coming in now seem to be from people who did not immediately notice the suspicious activity on their account, but people should still check their bank accounts frequently in case not all of the card numbers collected by the thieves have been used yet.

Anyone with information on the case is asked to call Detective Robert Guerrero at 541-667-5098.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.



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In this file photo, Clinton Shaver, of the Molalla Rural Fire District, watches last summer's Canyon Creek Fire south of John Day. The state has renewed its wildfire insurance policy.

FIRE: Oregon is the only state to purchase wildfire insurance

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Legislative Fiscal Office. Only about \$30 million of that, however, was counted toward the state's wildfire insurance deductible.

A committee of public and private forestland owners voted in March to renew the policy. That committee typically pays 50 percent of the premium but could only pay 11 percent this year because state law limits how much it can spend on fire suppression. It has already hit that \$13.5 million threshold, leaving the state to make up the difference of nearly \$1.4 million.

The Joint Legislative Emergency Board — which approves budget adjustments between legislative sessions — approved that additional expenditure Wednesday.

Oregon is the only state in the nation to purchase

wildfire insurance, though Washington also is considering acquiring a policy, said Rod Nichols, spokesman for the Department of Forestry.

"Oregon first purchased a policy in 1973 and has been doing so ever since," Nichols said. "In many years, our expenditures did not meet the deductible, and the state filed no claims. But in severe fire seasons, the policy protected the general fund and prevented major disruption to state government programs across the board."

Between 1973 and 2008, the state reached its deductible and received a payout only 13 times, according to data from the Department of Forestry, but those payouts equaled \$2 million more than the premiums. The department did not immediately provide data on payouts between 2009 and 2014.

POLICE: Better training, practices and equipment play key roles to increase in safety

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year ago. And the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, also a nonprofit, shows 39 deaths through May 23, five fewer than through the same time frame last year.

The FBI tracks how many law enforcement officers are feloniously killed in the line of duty. The agency released its preliminary findings for 2015 in mid May and reported 41 deaths, almost 20 percent less than the 51 in 2014.

Those numbers are a long ways from the days of Prohibition in the 1920s and early 1930s when police deaths in the U.S. approached and even exceeded 300 per year.

The 1970s also saw a rise in police deaths, though not quite to Prohibition levels, but since then deaths have been on an overall decline. The Memorial Fund shows police on-duty deaths exceeded 200 a year only once since 1981, when 241 died in 2001, primarily because of the terrorists attacks on Sept. 11.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts and Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said there are multiple factors accounting for the increase in police safety: better training, practices and equipment all play key roles.

"For Oregon, when I attended the police academy in 1997 it was eight weeks long and the conditions of the academy were cramped as it was housed on the Western Oregon University campus (in Monmouth)," Edmiston said in an email. "Now the basic police officer training is 16 weeks long and is separate in that they have a large campus (in Salem) with more hands-on drills and offer scenario-based trainings."

Roberts pointed to the value of the "Below 100 initiative," a nationwide effort to train police to focus on preventable line of duty deaths. The Pendleton Police



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Pendleton Police Cpl. Ryan Lehnert writes in his notepad while serving a summons for an outstanding warrant Tuesday in Pendleton.

"A healthy economy with citizens working can lead to a decline in criminal activity."

— Jason Edmiston, Hermiston Police Chief

Department, he said, is just one of many agencies that follow the initiative's recommendations, such as always having officers wear body armor and seat belts.

Achieving greater officer safety also means constant training, Roberts said, and Pendleton police engage in online training day in and out through Lexipol, a police policy provider. Roberts said that system provides 36 hours of training per year per officer for \$2,000.

Edmiston said continuing officer training is critical.

"For the 2016/17 budget I have requested an increase in our training budget to \$35,000, which comes out to roughly \$1,100 per employee in this department," he said. "Paying for appropriate training on the

front end makes more sense than paying attorneys on the tail end to defend an agency."

Less-lethal weapons, such as electric stun guns, the most common being the Taser, also are valuable tool for police, both chiefs said, because they can keep confrontations from becoming deadly. Hermiston police started using the Taser in 2002, around the same time as a lot of agencies in the U.S.

Factors far outside police control also play a role.

"As the economy started to tank in 2008," Edmiston said, "we predicted we would respond to more domestic-type situations, and we did. We all realize how volatile and difficult domestic situations are or can be for law enforcement. A healthy economy with citizens working can lead to a decline in criminal activity."

And Roberts said governments cutbacks on funding for social safety nets force police to be "all things to all people" — from marriage counselor in one moment to drug and alcohol analyst the next. Police often have dealt 10 times with offenders suffering from addiction

or mental illness, he said, before that person ever goes before a judge.

While police may be safer today than in years past, Roberts said he sees a growing "propensity of violence against law enforcement." Officer Down reported a 19 percent increase in the number of gunfire deaths so far in 2016. Roberts attributed the rise to erosion of the public trust in police due in large part to the reckless actions of a few cops that grab headlines.

Pendleton police, for example, have thousands of interactions a year, he said, and a fraction of those involve violence. Yet that fraction can get a lot of public attention.

Police need to own up to mistakes in some circumstances, Roberts said, but there also needs to be an examination of what led up to certain situations. Roberts said too often the focus is on what happened in the moment and not the larger picture.

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CRP: Payments average roughly \$72 per acre per year

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peak in 2007.

The CRP, which turned 30 years old in December, is essentially a rental agreement between the government and local farmers: the FSA pays growers to take portions of their farmland out of production and plant native grasses instead, which cuts down on erosion, improves water quality and restores wildlife habitat. CRP agreements typically run for 10-15 years, and the ground is usually less suitable for crops anyway — it might be located on a steep hillside, or have shallower soil.

Some farmers have even come to depend on the CRP as a steady, reliable source of income when commodity prices fall, as they have in recent years. Since 2014, corn, wheat and soybean prices have all tumbled by as much as half. CRP payments can be invaluable as growers wait for those markets to rebound.

That's why it has come as such a shock following the most recent CRP enrollment period earlier this year, said Darcy Sexson, Umatilla County FSA director. Just 34 percent of the county's bids were accepted into the program when the announcement was made on May 5, down from 96 percent during the last sign-up in 2013.

"To have such a dramatic shift in acceptance rates, I think that was a surprise," Sexson said. "They either have to tear up that grass and plant it into something, or

"A lot of guys have had their CRP in for 30 years. They're wondering what they're going to do next."

— Kyle Carnine, Morrow County FSA director

they don't draw an income off that land."

It's the same story in Morrow County, where out of 12,000 acres that were bid into CRP, just 3,000 made the cut.

"A lot of guys have had their CRP in for 30 years," said Kyle Carnine, county FSA director. "They're wondering what they're going to do next."

Both counties will hold a meeting together on June 8 at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds to help guide farmers through the transition. The CRP is not a retirement program, though Sexson said that in some cases growers put their entire farms into the program and sold off all their equipment. For them, they face starting over from scratch.

Across the country, the FSA says contracts on 1.64 million acres of CRP are set to expire Sept. 30. Agency spokesman Kent Politsch said most won't make it back into the program.

"We've got a cap. And that cap keeps shrinking," Politsch said. "We've got to be able to adjust the number of acres that are being accepted so we don't exceed that cap."

Applications that are approved must meet criteria that scores the benefits of conservation, including whether the land will

provide new wildlife habitat or serve as a buffer to protect streams and rivers. Politsch said this is called the Environmental Benefit Index.

During a recent visit to Boardman, FSA Administrator Val Dolcini said the CRP has been responsible for preventing 600 million dump trucks of soil from being lost to erosion, and sequestered enough carbon to equal taking 9 million cars off the road. A recent report from the Umatilla Basin Watershed Council also shows water quality has improved in Wildhorse Creek since 2010, as the result of reduced erosion and more riparian protection.

Now, Sexson said they are setting up farmland to be

susceptible again as farmers work to make ends meet.

"In some cases, farmers are at slim margins if not negative margins on cropping systems," she said.

CRP payments average roughly \$72 per acre per year in Umatilla County, Sexson said.

Politsch said that, instead of focusing on quantity of land in CRP, growers should focus on getting their best land enrolled. As for commodity prices, he said markets are cyclical.

"That's what farming is," he said. "You adapt to the circumstances."

The June 8 meeting will be held at 8 a.m. at the Let 'er Buck Room. For more information, call the Umatilla County FSA Office at 541-278-8049 or the Morrow County Office at 541-676-9011.

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