

CONSUMER

# Gas station scam might make you pay for other people's gas. Here's how



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A gas station scam which requires someone else to handle the pump for you could leave New Jersey drivers vulnerable to unscrupulous gas attendants, since here we don't pump our own fuel.

The gas pump switching scheme targets drivers paying for gas with a credit card. In all states but New Jersey, where self-serve is forbidden, the perpetrator is another driver who "helpfully" offers to put the gas pump away for the scammed driver. In reality, he or she doesn't put the pump away, but instead offers to fill up the next car, using the first driver's credit card and taking cash from the new driver. The process continues as long as they can pull it off.

This scheme has been trending since at least the summer of 2023. Back then, local Pennsylvania police advised drivers to pump their own gas and to make sure they hang up nozzle themselves so the transaction closes, 6ABC in Philadelphia reported.

But what can be done in New Jersey, where drivers don't handle the pump?

## How to avoid 'gas pump switching' in New Jersey

While it might seem odd to have someone else offer to pull out your pump at a self-serve station, in New Jersey that's routine. As long as the gas station attendant is honest, that's no problem. But a crooked employee who has no intentions of staying on the job for long might be able to pull it off.

To prevent your money from filling your neighbors' tanks, Go Banking Rates, a personal finance site, recommends drivers to request a receipt for the gas sale. By doing so, you

ensure the transaction is closed and that your credit card won't be charged for more gas than the amount you bought.

Even in a hurry, you should always get your receipt. Doing so will take less time than contacting your credit card company and authorities after you've been scammed.

When traveling out of state, avoid interacting with people that don't work at the gas station, yet somehow want to involve themselves with your gas-pumping process.

## **How to avoid skimming, a typical gas pump scam**

Skimming devices are illegal card readers that scammers attach to payment machines in ways that can't be noticed. When a victim swipes their card, the skimming device will copy and retain the credit card information the scammer would use to access the victim's money.

Here are some tips from Go Banking Rate to avoid the trap:

Wiggle the credit card reader to see if it is misaligned, doesn't fit or is wobbling.

In a gas station, skimming devices can be installed inside the gas pump, making it even harder to notice. Check if the pump casing looks like it has been tampered with, has gaps or any other suspicious trait.

Gas stations have been incorporating contactless payment options, in part to prevent skimming incidents as taping your card is more secure than swiping it. But scammers know this, and have been damaging payment machines to disable contactless payment. In gas stations, a common method involves drilling a hole in the gas pump contactless payment screen. Once damaged, the machine would default to swipe payments, leaving your credit card vulnerable to skimming.

If you notice a hole drilled in a gas pump payment screen, a card reader that looks suspicious, or a tampered pump casing, let the gas station workers know so they can shut down the pump and investigate.

