

Fake Phone Terminals Scheme Gave Criminal Ring \$500M Monthly

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Police in the Central Federal District shut down a criminal ring with 150 members that allegedly funneled up to 15 billion rubles (\$500 million) out of the country each month using a network of fake payment terminals, the Interior Ministry's press service [said](#) Friday.

The group operated over 2,500 payment terminals owned by various fly-by-night firms. The terminals were located in Moscow and throughout the Moscow, Smolensk, Vladimir, Tver and Kaluga regions.

The suspects used the payment terminals to funnel money out of the country in embezzlement and tax evasion schemes, police said. All money placed into the terminals by people simply hoping to put credit on their mobile phones or pay utility bills went to the criminal syndicate instead.

Police arrested the mastermind and four leaders of the group, whose identities are being withheld pending the completion of the investigation. They have all reportedly confessed and are cooperating with investigators.

They face criminal charges of illegal banking activity and organizing a criminal syndicate, which carry maximum sentences of seven years in prison and life imprisonment.

Police caution against using electronic payment terminals located in suspicious public places, warning of the possibility of "an irretrievable loss of funds."

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