

NEWS

## Feds: Staten Island man tangled up in credit-card payment scam in western Pa.

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- A Staten Island man was among six New Yorkers who concocted a complex fraud scheme involving the processing of credit-card payments and transactions by consumers in western Pennsylvania, said authorities.

Azad Khizgilov, 43, has been indicted in federal court in Pittsburgh on charges of mail fraud, wire fraud and bank fraud, said Scott W. Brady, U.S. attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania, in a statement.

Also charged were Brooklyn residents Tamara Feldman, 29; Svetlana Kapralova, 30; Philip Krasnikov, 31, and Roman Shaulov, 50, along with Manhattan resident Devan Abrams, 37, said authorities.

Officials said the defendants used credit card products and services to pay for certain "precluded activities," including the online sales of pharmaceutical drugs and of the sale of products violating trademark laws, online gambling and various other illegal or high-risk activities.

Credit card companies don't permit such purchases, but the defendants subverted those organizations' internal controls to make it seem as though they were buying permitted goods, said authorities.

They set up shell corporations and web sites falsely claiming they sold products other than the precluded ones, and applied for merchant accounts from the credit card companies, said authorities.

Once the merchant accounts were established, the defendants used them to process consumers' payments.

To hide their tracks, they sent credit-card statements to customers with the names of the shell corporations and phone numbers, said officials. They also created a telephone bank to receive consumers' calls about billing questions, authorities said.

Khizgilov was arrested on Dec. 20, and is scheduled to be arraigned on Jan. 24, online court records show.

If convicted, the defendants potentially face up to 30 years behind bars, a fine of up to \$1 million, or both.

Khizgilov is free on bond pending his arraignment in Pittsburgh federal court.

Defense lawyer Joseph Tacopina said his client denies the charges.

"Mr. Khizgilov was fully aware of the prosecution's investigation long before it filed an indictment in this case," said Tacopina. "He maintained his innocence during that investigation, and he continues to do so now. In fact, the one and only charge in the indictment makes clear that the prosecution's beliefs during the investigation were flat-out wrong. Mr. Khizgilov now looks forward to his day in court, so he may show that the single remaining accusation against him is false."