

COUNTERFEIT PRODUCTS

WHY BUYING FAKES CAN BE BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH (AND MORE)

INTRODUCTION

The counterfeit goods industry is estimated to be worth up to US \$200 billion (source: OECD) and the goods produced cross every imaginable product sector, including:

- tobacco, alcohol and food products
- designer clothes, watches, and accessories
- medicines, chemicals and pesticides
- perfume, cosmetics and bodycare products
- CDs, DVDs, computer software, games
- vehicle and other spare parts
- power tools and household appliances.

WHY YOU SHOULD AVOID FAKES

Fake goods are often tempting as they cost less than the real thing, but they are inferior in quality and may be **unsafe and dangerous**. Of course they also don't come with any after-sales service or guarantees.

Many consumers are unaware that counterfeit goods don't undergo the same rigorous testing that legitimate manufacturers apply to their products to ensure they are safe. The fake products are often poorly made, **do not comply with European safety standards** and could be **potentially lethal**.

The fake goods industry is not the victimless crime you might imagine

it to be. It might seem like a harmless activity but **serious organised crime gangs monopolise the trade in counterfeit goods**. In other words, if you buy a fake designer bag or knock-off sunglasses, it is the final link in a chain that profits criminals who can be involved in extortion, people-smuggling, prostitution, drug trafficking and even terrorism. And these criminal enterprises are going to make the product as quickly and cheaply as they can, with **low quality and potentially dangerous materials and ingredients**. They really don't care about the after-effects – they're just interested in maximising their profits.

The majority of counterfeit items come from factories in the Far East, 'staffed' by children who are paid very little, have no labour rights and work up to 18 hours a day. As the demand for fakes grows, so does the amount of **sweat shops** producing these products.

Counterfeit items also have a very **damaging effect on the economy** as they are often smuggled into the EU, to avoid duty and VAT. Through this, manufacturing and retail jobs are lost because legitimate companies cannot compete with people selling on the street and online at cheap prices. In turn, this leads to a loss of reinvestment and innovation.

THE RISKS OF FAKE GOODS

Medicines and pharmaceutical products

Counterfeit medication can have very serious health implications as fakes have been found to contain no active ingredients, many times the safe limit of active ingredient, or they are made using ineffective or

dangerous substitutes which can cause liver damage, irreversible health problems or even prove to be fatal.

Fake pills are on offer for many conditions such as heart problems, diabetes and high blood pressure. Of course we have all heard about fake impotence drugs. And it doesn't take much imagination to realise the potential consequences of a poor-quality, fake condom... Unfortunately, a lot of the medicines sold online are counterfeit so you should always make sure you buy these types of products from a legitimate pharmacy.

Continued overleaf



Counterfeit designer sunglasses which don't offer the UV protection stated on the fake label

THE RISKS OF FAKE GOODS, CONTINUED

Cigarettes and alcohol

Counterfeit cigarettes generally contain much higher levels of tar and nicotine than genuine brands, and produce more harmful carbon monoxide. They could incorporate a seriously unhealthy mix of cancer-causing chemicals including arsenic, cadmium, benzene and formaldehyde – far greater than genuine cigarettes.

Counterfeit alcoholic drinks can contain high levels of methanol, a chemical that can cause breathing difficulties, liver damage, coma and even death, as demonstrated by a case in Turkey where 23 people died after consuming counterfeit alcohol containing lethal levels of methyl alcohol.

Clothing

Poison in children's clothing is the latest risk emerging from counterfeiters. A recent investigation found formaldehyde in woollen and cotton clothes which was 500 times higher than safe levels should be. The chemical is used to give a permanent press effect to clothes but high levels (20 parts per million) can cause eye, skin and nasal irritation, respiratory problems, asthma and skin cancer, say the World Health Organisation.

Batteries

You might find it hard to believe that a battery could cause problems - at most, it might just run out very quickly. Unfortunately, lithium-ion

battery packs, along with their chargers, can cause harm through burns, explosions or catching fire. The problem can also extend to fake mobile phone and regular AA batteries. Electrolytes inside the batteries can leak, there is often no vent to stop an explosion and at times they claim to be alkaline but are made using cheap carbon zinc technology which can be explosive when mixed with regular alkaline batteries.

Electronic goods

Counterfeit electronics can be downright dangerous. But the people who make these fake electrical products don't really care about your safety. The products are made with sub-standard insulation, undersize wire, and other parts which are inadequate from a safety perspective. They often have counterfeit safety seals to make them look legit - the manufacturers of the fakes want you to think the products have been safety tested when they haven't.

The products can shock you, or overheat and catch fire. And you have no idea until that emergency happens, the product doesn't break, doesn't shut off and you end up with a fire on your hands.

TIPS FOR SPOTTING FAKES

The most obvious red flag is the price. Any item being sold at a ridiculously low price (50% or less of usual price) is most likely to be counterfeit.

Pay attention to where you are offered cheap goods. Fake goods are often sold away from the high street where it's harder to trace the

seller. Be particularly cautious at street markets and product fairs. If shopping online, check the feedback and reviews the seller has from previous buyers.

Research high-value goods using the manufacturer's website before you buy. Examine pictures, logos and labels so you're familiar with how the genuine article should be.

Examine the quality of goods and steer clear of those showing poor workmanship. Misspelled labels and poor quality logos are an easily recognisable trait of all kinds of fake goods.

Ask questions if you're suspicious. Sellers of fake goods may be vague about the origins of their products or may try and explain differences in price or appearance by the fact that the goods are being imported from abroad.

Be aware of payment methods. Sellers may ask you to pay by cash or offer you the chance to avoid paying taxes.

If you discover counterfeit products, you should report them to your local authorities.

**AND REMEMBER -
IF A DEAL SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO
BE TRUE, THEN IT PROBABLY IS...**