

Until about ten years ago, luxury goods were the prime target for counterfeiting. Now almost everything you can think of is faked, from car parts to pharmaceuticals, toys to mobile phones.

Counterfeiters do not invest in research and development or care about complying with safety regulations. They set up production lines in temporary buildings, most often these days in developing countries, particularly China, using all manner of ingredients.



They try to make their counterfeits look enough like the real thing so that consumers want to buy them, either when they are innocently after a bargain, or when they are deliberately choosing to buy fake goods.

Either way, there is a very high price to pay, as counterfeits pose a serious threat which has already caused many deaths worldwide.

ACG campaigns tirelessly to raise awareness of the risks involved. We all love a bargain, but increasing numbers of goods on sale, particularly in markets and from auction sites on the Internet, should be bought with care, or avoided.

**PRICE, PLACE & PACKAGING** are all indicators of whether something is genuine, or whether you may be at risk. Supermarkets, well-known retailers and brand-name or familiar retail websites are much less likely to sell fakes. But a vast range of products for sale in the street, in markets or in cyberspace could well be counterfeit, and very dangerous.

### **ALCOHOL**

**The dangers:** Fake spirits can contain high levels of methanol, a chemical that can cause blindness, coma, and even death. We've come across drink calling itself vodka which was actually pure methylated spirits; that would cause acute liver damage, and possibly blindness. Those who have suffered toxic hepatitis in this way will never be well again. In Russia, many hundreds of people have already died, and thousands have been ill, after drinking cheap vodka - made in Russia from household



cleaning agents, laced with lighter fuel, aftershave or antiseptics. Some even buy such spirit-rich liquids and simply dilute them with water.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has issued several warnings in the UK, for example about counterfeit Johnnie Walker Black Label, which was seized by enforcement officers in various towns around the country. In 2003, a woman died in Scotland after drinking fake vodka. Since then, trading standards have seized thousands of bottles of fake alcoholic drinks all over the UK, from independent off licenses, discount stores, markets and car boot sales. Fake alcohol is still one of the preferred sources of funding for criminals in the Republic of Ireland, made in illegal stills on both sides of the border.



**How to spot a fake:** Examine the quality and cleanliness of gift cartons, bottles and labels. Look closely for spelling and artwork mistakes, especially brand logos and designs. Pay particular attention to the bottle closure and its anti-tamper evident device. Look carefully for any sign that the bottle may have been opened previously. Be wary of brands you do not recognise. Always buy from a reputable, licensed stockist or bona fide duty-free outlet.

### **FRAGRANCES**

**The dangers:** Counterfeit perfume can burn your skin or leave you with a nasty rash, which is likely to recur when you use any kind of perfume in the future. Tests on some fake fragrances have revealed that urine has been used as a stabiliser.



Handley Brustad, Senior Trading Standards Officer at Cardiff County Council, reports: "With perfume, you really don't know what you're getting. We had one bottle of 'perfume' analysed, and found it to be pond water with a fragrance added."

**How to spot a fake:** Be wary of products with low-quality packaging, no logo, or mis-spelt brand names. Again, the biggest warning sign is the vendor. As genuine fragrances are high-end products, they are mostly sold in large, reputable retail outlets – distrust the man on the street promising a bargain, or the auction site selling many different brands. Never buy sight unseen; always buy from a trustworthy source.

**Worldwide, fake products have killed thousands; even a single death is one too many.**

**SUNGLASSES**

**The dangers:** Sunglasses are seen as an easy target by counterfeiters, as consumers are attracted by the promise of 'designer' versions at 'bargain' prices. However, fake sunglasses may not provide any protection at all against ultra-violet rays, leaving the wearer at risk to eye damage.



Customs have seized fake designer sunglasses worth millions of pounds. The fake versions of brands such as Armani are poor quality replicas, with no UV protection from sunlight. They arrive mostly in containers from China, heading for markets and discount stores all over the country.

**How to spot a fake:** Watch out for 'designer' sunglasses sold unpackaged, or in flimsy unmarked plastic sleeves. Test the hinges. They will be inferior in fake versions. A lack of peel-off certificate - usually a small label affixed to one of the lenses - proving UV protection is another pointer. Brian Burgh, Senior Trading Standards Officer at City of Sunderland Council Trading Standards, comments: "A big giveaway with fake sunglasses is you can just scratch off the name. I've done that with a few pairs in front of retailers, and they weren't impressed!"

**CIGARETTES**

**The dangers:** In China alone, around 100 billion counterfeit cigarettes are produced each year, many of which end up in the UK. As fake cigarettes are not subject to any regulations, they often contain excessive levels of tar and nicotine, presenting an increased risk to smokers. The London Borough of Islington has been targeting sellers of fake cigarettes for many years - joined by a German Shepherd called Jake to help detect hidden stashes. Tests of the counterfeits Jake found, by the local Primary Care Trust, showed them to be highly toxic and nine times more dangerous than normal cigarettes.



**How to spot a fake:** Fake cigarettes usually have packaging that resembles the brands they imitate, but the cigarettes themselves often taste very different. Look closely for spelling mistakes in the small print on the box. Other clues are foreign or mis-spelt safety warnings – or no safety warnings at all. Many sources of fakes use intensive labour to make the boxes by hand so their construction and the quality of the paper and glue are often noticeably inferior. Always buy from a reputable

stockist or duty-free outlet.

**THE DANGERS FOR CHILDREN**

Among the dangerous fakes in circulation are **toys** coated with paint with high levels of lead; fakes with detachable parts that could choke a small child; counterfeit soft toys with poor stitching so the eyes and stuffing fall out; **children's clothes**, especially pyjamas and T-shirts, which may be inflammable.

Every Christmas sees major seizures of fake children's toys and games often in shops specially opened to sell cheap Christmas gifts. Also beware of computer games and accessories.



Counterfeit Xboxes and games chargers are found to overheat and a few years ago the inquest of Connor O'Keefe heard how he died from electrocution on holiday, having left his Game Boy charger at home, when his parents innocently bought a fake replacement in Thailand.

The toy industry in the UK is worth around £2.94 billion annually. All well-known UK toy retailers sell only the genuine items, while discount stores, market stalls and Internet auction sites are all prime sources of counterfeits.

By law, toy packaging must display the CE mark and manufacturer's or importer's details. Also look for the BSI Kite and Lion quality marks and make sure that toys come in the original sealed packaging. Always buy from reputable stockists.



**THE GROWTH IN FAKE PHARMACEUTICALS**

This is possibly the most worrying trend of all. Africa and India have suffered greatly for many years from fake malaria and AIDS drugs, but until three years ago fake medicines were not thought to be a problem in developed countries.

It may seem quite amusing - and harmless - that fake Viagra is now widely available in the West, particularly online. Pfizer, the maker of the real thing, has done a fantastic job to ensure that consumers are aware of the existence of fakes, and is taking enormous trouble to enforce their rights against the counterfeiters.

The bigger problem though, is that medicines, which are supposed to cure or treat serious conditions, are now

appearing in fake form, and the Internet is so difficult to police. In the UK, law enforcement can only close down illegal British-based sites, as they have no jurisdiction abroad. International collaboration, using shared databases, such as exists for credit card fraud, is still a distant goal.



Worst of all, perhaps was when three fake drugs were found in the UK supply chain a few years ago: Casodex (prostate cancer) Zyprexa (schizophrenia) and Plavix (thrombosis). All were linked to the same drugs wholesaler, and all came from the Far East or Indian Sub-continent. The criminals responsible are now in prison.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society has released research revealing that more than 2 million people in the UK buy prescription medicines over the Internet without knowing if the online pharmacy or the medicines are legitimate, and almost a third of these medicines are counterfeit. It has just launched a logo scheme for genuine online pharmacies, to start a system of accreditation, but this is voluntary and people will remain at risk.



For more information, and a way to report suspect products or suppliers, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) now has an area of its website dedicated to information about counterfeits [Link to website.](#)

Our advice in this area is simple: for the moment, do not buy medicines online, and always buy on prescription from your doctor from whichever nearby pharmacy the surgery recommends.

## FOODSTUFFS/HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Counterfeiters worldwide now make every conceivable household product, without safety tests or quality controls, including sweets, baby food, instant coffee, chewing gum and - incredibly - even olive oil. (A test has now been invented, since there is a big demand for high-quality olive oil, which can distinguish the real from the inferior fake product.)



Several large hauls of fake Dettol have been seized in the UK, and there have also been incidents of fake toothpaste from China, containing diethylene glycol,

also found in anti-freeze. The chemical could be toxic to young children and anyone with impaired liver or kidney function.

**FAKE DISPOSABLE RAZORS** have been found with blades so blunt and damaged that they have caused serious facial abrasions when used, once removed from the apparently genuine packaging, which carries a famous brand name.



**POWER TOOLS** Many fake tools are imported from the Far East with faulty wiring, no operating instructions, plastic internal parts instead of metal, no warranty and no spares when the tools' primary drive gears soon fail. There are well-documented cases of fake tools offered for sale around the country, and trading standards have seized them in Worcester, Suffolk, Dorset, Essex and Pembrokeshire.

**BATTERIES** Well-known brand names are used by the fakers, with similar packaging, but the batteries themselves can be either nearly dead or, more worryingly, actually made specially as fakes, with no safety tests and incorrect chemical ingredients, making them volatile and prone to exploding.



## MOBILE PHONES/ACCESSORIES/BATTERIES

There have been actual cases where fake mobile phone batteries have exploded e.g. when the phone is dropped. In the UK, Camden Trading Standards destroyed £25,000-worth of fake in-car phone chargers, after reports that they melted during use. Poor quality accessories such as ear-phones can damage hearing when in long-term use. A construction worker in China was killed in summer 2007 when his mobile phone exploded in his shirt pocket. The victim suffered broken ribs, fragments of which pierced his heart. It was suspected that the battery was fake.



**FAKE CLIPPER LIGHTERS** Fake Clipper lighters from China have appeared in Scotland, with a faulty flame control mechanism. Spanish company Flamagas, which makes the genuine lighters, promptly issued warnings via its UK distributor.



Trading Standards tests produced fireballs but luckily there were no serious injuries.

**SOAP** 50,000 tons of fake soap made in China were seized in Dover, when Customs estimated that the trade in fake toiletries cost the UK £735million a year. The fake soap had not been safety-tested and some ingredients used in such counterfeit products can affect eyesight, or harm the skin so that allergies are created, preventing future use of genuine versions of the product.



**OTHER EXAMPLES IN BRIEF**

**Peanut butter:** a high risk of aflatoxin can exist in poorly processed peanuts. Made in Asia, found USA.

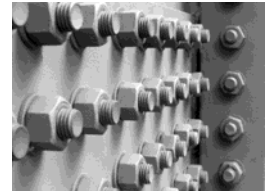


**Crane parts:** a US manufacturer reported companies in Asia using fake parts in unlicensed sections of their cranes, and created a task force to tackle the problem and raise awareness amongst its customers in that region.

**Health Drinks:** Contained ten times the recommended safe level of ephedrine. Found: UK

**Bus brake diaphragms:** Copy brake diaphragms were found fortunately prior to use. When tested these burst after as few as eight applications. This would have rendered the brakes inoperative. Genuine performance standards specify over one million applications. Found: UK

**Nuts and bolts for construction:** Caused parts of a building to collapse during an earthquake. Found: USA



**Helicopter parts:** Resulted in several accidents and the legitimate manufacturer faced a number of court actions as a result. Found: USA

**Industrial hoists:** Copy products failed to incorporate a vital safety brake and could easily have caused death or injury. Found: Canada

**Hand Tools:** Made of such brittle steel they broke into razor sharp fragments. Found USA

**Washing powder:** Highly caustic ingredients caused skin burns. Found: USA

If it seems too good to be true, it probably is... with fakes, you might get more than you bargained for!

**Be original—don't buy fakes ANYWHERE!**

For further information visit:  
[www.a-cg.org](http://www.a-cg.org)



- Counterfeits are Dangerous
- Fakes Fund Crime
- Counterfeits Cost Jobs
- Counterfeits are Rip-Offs
- Counterfeiting Kills
- Counterfeits are Everywhere

