

How many counterfeit goods do you have in your home, without even knowing?

By Emma Pearce



Emma Pearce is a brand protection manager at UL. In her role, she verifies the authenticity of UL Marks, and works closely with customs agencies around the world to help identify counterfeit products and stop their entry into the global marketplace.

Most people would deny ever consciously purchasing a counterfeit product. Yet, the reality is that counterfeits have infiltrated the most banal products, from toothpaste to tobacco, and airbags to light fixtures. Consumers, law enforcement and corporate purchasers all need to be better informed on the many types of counterfeits out there, and the irreparable harm they may bring.

A global marketplace for counterfeits

Mention counterfeits, and people often think of luxury clothing or watches. What's the harm? Companies still make enough money, right? While it may be true that big brands continue to make profits, it doesn't make counterfeiting harmless.

In fact, we are often largely ignorant of not only how much harm counterfeits can inflict, but also the sheer numbers and diversity of knock-offs in the market.

You name it, it's been counterfeited

The counterfeit business finds a niche everywhere. For example, in countries where people are required to pay for most of their own healthcare, there is an underground market for counterfeit medicines. Or heavy manufacturing centers in high demand of various components are flooded with cheap counterfeit parts that are then used in everything from e-cigarettes to toys to air bags. Even the agricultural industry sees counterfeits, pesticides with untested and undeclared active substances, and fake seeds, which are sold as something which they are not.

Increasingly, counterfeit components find their way into smartphones, adapters and other electrical merchandise. Manufacturers that are under pressure to launch products quickly take the first component they find without performing supply chain due diligence, and thus damage the integrity and safety of their product.

Also on the rise – fake batteries. Batteries are frequently refurbished or tampered with and put back out on the market at a cut-rate price and with no safety testing.

Damaged goods from beginning to end

The harm that counterfeits inflict on society is manifold. It begins with the implicit ties to criminal organizations, disrupting legitimate supply and trade routes. Even more shocking, the people brought in to sell counterfeits on the street are often victims of human trafficking.

The damage goes on to directly affect consumer safety. Products that have a counterfeit component like a wire or battery are more likely to melt, release toxic fumes, give an electric shock, or even explode. Obviously, consuming counterfeit medicines could have dire results, as well, such as poisoning, the worsening of an illness, or developing a new condition.

Fake components in items like fuse boxes and light fixtures may damage property, resulting in huge costs and anguish among staff. Ultimately, companies that have used counterfeit elements in their products are also prone to face lawsuits and a loss of reputation, if not business, when found that their product led to personal injury or damages.

A trend you don't want to buy into

Unfortunately, due to a range of online shopping portals and an increasing willingness of consumers to travel to other countries to shop, counterfeiters have found direct access to buyers. Not that all purchases made online or abroad are questionable, but consumers shopping online generally do have less means to check the validity of the suppliers.

So, what can you do? As a consumer, don't take anything for granted, and use common sense. If the price is too good, it usually means something is amiss. Shop locally and when researching online, check reviews and sales numbers. If you prefer to shop online, stick to sites of well-known brick and mortar shops, i.e., with a reputable brand that vouches for quality.

Retailers should also make a point to source only from trusted suppliers and insist on seeing certification of the products. Finally, manufacturers need to protect their products by also demanding certification for each and every component.

In the end, counterfeiters can't compete when due diligence is carried out by all parties: consumers, retailers, and manufacturers. So be aware, stay safe, and happy shopping!

Learn more about anti-counterfeiting on

[BeSafeBuyReal.ul.org](https://www.BeSafeBuyReal.ul.org)