



The Anti-Counterfeiting Group
Campaigning Against the Trade in Fakes
www.a-cg.com

THE DANGERS OF FAKES

ALCOHOL

The dangers: Fake spirits can contain high levels of methanol, a chemical that can cause blindness, coma, and even death.

In November 2002, The Food Standards Agency (FSA) issued a warning in the UK about counterfeit Johnnie Walker Black Label, which was seized by enforcement officers in various towns around the country. It contained extremely high levels of methanol, a chemical that can cause illness, blindness and even death if consumed in large quantities.

In March 2003, the FSA also issued a similar warning about fake whisky following a raid on a suspected counterfeit bottling plant in Berkshire. *In the same month, a woman died in Scotland after drinking fake vodka.*

In May 2003 The FSA issued a warning about fake Kelvenoff Vodka, believed to contain dangerous levels of methanol, which was found at an off-licence shop in Barnet, Herts, during routine searches by Customs and Excise officers.

We've come across drink that called itself vodka which was actually pure methylated spirits. That would cause liver damage, possibly blindness. There are many other examples of fake spirits being sold - discount stores, markets and car boot sales are all prime sources. Always buy from a known retail outlet.

How to spot a fake: Examine the quality and cleanliness of gift cartons, bottles and labels. Look closely for spelling and artwork mistakes on gift cartons and bottles, 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.

PERFUME

The dangers: Counterfeit perfume can often burn your skin or leave you with a nasty rash. 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 pondwater 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 perfumes are perceived as high-end products, they are mostly sold in large, reputable outlets - distrust the man on the street promising a bargain. Always buy from a trustworthy source.

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. Brian Burgh, Principal Trading Standards Officer at City of Sunderland Council, says: "They might look good, but they offer you no protection at all. They're lethal."

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 comments: "The 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!"

SUN CREAM

The dangers:

Reports have warned of false labelling on some suncreams found here in the UK which claimed high protection but only offered a low SPF. A journalist then suffered serious sunburn in Egypt researching an article on the dangers of fakes on holiday. He had purchased a spray-on potion locally with a true SPF of only 1.1, not 15 as claimed.

How to spot a fake:

It's best to buy your suncreams here in the UK from a reputable retailer, as those sold abroad can be unfamiliar, as well as very expensive, or even fake. Look at quality of packaging, weight of plastic used in the containers, spelling of brand names and ingredients. Also check the use-by date carefully and choose those which protect against UVB as well as UVA rays.

CIGARETTES

The dangers: In China alone, around 100 billion counterfeit cigarettes are produced each year, many of which end up in popular holiday destinations. As fake cigarettes are not subject to any regulations, they often contain excessive levels of tar and nicotine, presenting an increased risk to smokers. For example, fake cigarettes seized in Camden in 2002 were found to contain 75% more tar, 28% more nicotine, and 36% more carbon monoxide. Cigarettes can also be contaminated with substances such as plastics, wrapping materials, and even sand.

How to spot a fake: Fake cigarettes usually have packaging that closely resembles the brands they imitate, while the cigarettes themselves often taste noticeably 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. If in doubt, buy from a reputable stockist or duty-free outlet.

THE DANGERS FOR CHILDREN

Among the dangerous fakes in circulation are *Star Wars* figures coated with paint with high levels of lead; fake Pokémon watches with detachable parts that could choke a small child; fake Beyblades with sharp metal edges; counterfeit Bob the Builder soft toys with such poor stitching that the stuffing and beads fell out; children's clothes, especially pyjamas and T-shirts, which may be inflammable; bogus perfumes that may be harmful to the skin; and electrical hair styling products with faulty plugs.

Look for the BSI Kite and Lion quality marks which indicate that the toy or clothing has passed rigorous safety tests. Also make sure that toys come in original sealed packaging and always buy for children from reputable stockists.

GROWTH IN TRADE OF FAKE PHARMACEUTICALS

Due to the clandestine nature of counterfeiting and fakes, it is not possible to come up with a truly accurate figure for the percentage of world trade which counterfeit goods represent. Pharmaceuticals are easy to transport and have a high value, which makes them prime targets for counterfeiters.

There is no hard evidence of a serious counterfeit pharmaceuticals problem yet in the UK, although Reductil and Cialis fakes were found here last year and it is thought that the Internet is already contributing to an increase in the availability of fake medicines here. The Medicines & Healthcare Regulatory Agency is rolling out a specific anti-counterfeiting strategy as well as widening the remit of its medicines surveillance scheme from pharmacies to the whole supply chain.

(The problem is already common in the US and their FDA report which can be found at http://www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/counterfeit/report02_04.html)

In Glasgow in 2003, police warned of a huge resurgence in potentially lethal counterfeit diazepam and Tamazepan tablets being imported to the west of Scotland.

FOODSTUFFS & HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Counterfeiters now make every conceivable product, without safety tests or quality controls, including tea bags, instant coffee and - incredibly - even olive oil! There is now a big demand for high-quality olive oil and a test has now been invented which can distinguish the real from the inferior fake product. Several large hauls of fake Dettol were seized in the UK last year, which smelled highly toxic (I didn't test the bottle we were sent by trading standards!).

FAKE DISPOSABLE RAZORS have been found with blades so blunt and damaged that they have caused serious facial abrasions when used (I actually met a taxi driver in March who told me that he had suffered a bad cut from a razor he had bought in a market which he thought was the real thing because a famous brand name and distinctive packaging were used).

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.

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. Last autumn, 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.

OTHER EXAMPLES IN BRIEF

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

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

Nuts and Bolts for Construction: Caused parts of a building to collapse during an earthquake. Found: USA

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

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

Washing powder: Highly caustic ingredients caused skin burns. Found: UK

Health Drinks:

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

Lobbying

Awareness

Networking