



# ELECTRICAL COUNTERFEIT AWARENESS

## *Electrical counterfeits can and do kill.*

Every day, counterfeit electrical products are finding their way into our homes, businesses, and public institutions. These fraudulent products pose a serious financial and legal liability to the electrical industry, and they have become a grave safety crisis for our communities - a crisis that requires immediate action.

Counterfeit electrical products pose significant safety hazards, and left undetected can cause deaths, injuries and substantial property loss in the home and the workplace.

This fact sheet provides information on the simple steps that consumers can take to identify and avoid these potentially dangerous devices, and offers additional background about the *Counterfeits Can Kill* campaign.

## What is Electrical Counterfeiting?

Trademark counterfeiting has reached the electrical sector. Counterfeiters have targeted well-known industrial and consumer brands, and registered certification marks of testing and certification laboratories.

Although counterfeit products may appear as excellent copies of their original counterparts, these products are often made using inferior materials and lax methods to produce substandard products. Advertised at prices unable to be matched by a genuine brand manufacturer, these products have failed to pass minimum safety tests upon investigation by authorities.

Undetected counterfeit electrical products such as circuit breakers, batteries, extension cords, and holiday lights can cause fires, shocks, explosions, and electrocutions.

*64% of counterfeit electrical products are purchased from authorized retailers.*



## What is the *Counterfeits Can Kill* Campaign?

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI), in cooperation with the National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA), has launched *Counterfeits Can Kill*, a national electrical counterfeit awareness program to help educate the public about the dangers of electrical counterfeit products.

This program offers a series of fact sheets and multimedia materials about best practices for electrical counterfeit awareness. To access these resources, please visit the Electrical Safety Foundation International web site at [www.electrical-safety.org](http://www.electrical-safety.org).

An educational DVD titled “Counterfeits Can Kill” has also been produced by ESFI and NEMA to promote this issue, and is available in both English and Spanish versions.

## FACTS ABOUT COUNTERFEITING AND ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS

- According to The Gallup Organization, less than one-third of Americans are aware that counterfeit versions of electrical products such as batteries, extension cords, and circuit breakers even exist.
- Counterfeit goods account for 5%-7% of global trade activity, a value of nearly \$600 billion.
- In FY 2007, the U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) confiscated nearly \$200 million worth of counterfeit products – the equivalent of 37 seizures per day.
- By mid-year FY 2008, CBP had already seized 796 shipments of counterfeit goods, valued domestically at \$24.8 million – a 28% increase in total number of seizures and a 30% increase from mid-year FY 2007.
- In FY 2006, counterfeit electrical products made up 5% of total seizures reported by CBP. One year later, these goods represented 8% of total seizures, valued at more than \$16 million.
- In a recent study conducted by the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI), 60% of Americans surveyed admitted to being unable to distinguish between an original and a counterfeit electrical product.
- According to The Gallup Organization, the most effective deterrents cited by consumers in preventing them from purchasing counterfeit goods are the possibility of supporting terrorism; causing harm to a loved one; and supporting organized crime.

## About ESFI

The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) is dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety.

ESFI is a 501(c)(3) organization funded by electrical manufacturers and distributors, independent testing laboratories, utilities, safety and consumer groups, and trade and labor associations.

ESFI sponsors National Electrical Safety Month each May, and engages in public education campaigns and proactive media relations to help reduce property damage, personal injury and death due to electrical accidents.

# SAFETY TIPS: COUNTERFEIT ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS

The following guidelines are designed to help consumers to identify and avoid potentially dangerous counterfeit electrical products:

**Use established vendors and authorized retailers.** Purchase electrical products from reputable retailers who obtain their goods from legitimate distributors and authorized manufacturers. Avoid purchasing electrical products at deep discount stores, flea markets, or bargain warehouses.

**Exercise caution in online transactions.** The convenience and anonymity of online shopping have been key factors in the dramatic rise in the growing inventory of counterfeit electrical products in the United States. Do your homework when conducting business online. Be especially wary of purchasing electrical products directly from unknown companies or unauthorized sellers, particularly in countries -- such as China, Russia, and India -- where counterfeiting is a major issue.

**Check for certification marks.** Quality electrical products sold in the United States should be certified by nationally-recognized testing laboratories for safety. Look for certification marks from laboratories such as UL, CSA, or ETL-SEMKO. If you have outstanding concerns about the marks, contact the certifier prior to product purchase or use.

**Scrutinize labels and packaging.** Distinguishing between an original product and its counterfeit version can be challenging, but product packaging and warning labels offer a valuable source of information and may reveal important telltale warning signs. Make sure that labels and packaging are free of grammatical errors, and that any information provided is consistent with information elsewhere on the package.

**Avoid products that lack any identifying brand label or affiliation.** Make sure that the name and contact information of the product manufacturer is clearly displayed on the packaging and/or the product. Legitimate manufacturers are proud of their products and stand by them. If this information is missing, then consider an alternative product or retailer.

**Trust your instincts.** Beware of bargains that seem too good to be true. Counterfeiters often use inferior materials and avoid key manufacturing steps to reduce the cost of their products, allowing them to be sold at prices no genuine brand manufacturer can match. Electrical products sold at extremely low prices may be counterfeit or defective.

**Be proactive.** Organizations such as the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and Underwriters Laboratories (UL) provide up-to-date information about product recalls on their websites. These publicly-searchable databases track detailed descriptions of product appearance, conditions of sale, make, model, hazard, and distributor.



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