



Impact of Counterfeit Electrical Products

Trademark counterfeiting has reached the electrical sector. Counterfeit electrical products impact both well-known industrial and consumer brands, as well as registered certification marks of testing and certification laboratories. The Electrical Safety Foundation International, warns, "Counterfeit electrical products can pose significant safety hazards and, left undetected, can cause deaths, injuries and substantial property loss in the home and workplace."

Counterfeit electrical products include, for example, control relays for industrial equipment, lamps, circuit breakers, electrical receptacles, ground fault circuit interrupters, conduit fittings, power strips and surge suppressors, and extension and power cords. Although counterfeit products may appear as excellent copies of the genuine product, investigations show that many are substandard and fail to pass minimum safety tests. Detection based on appearance can be difficult and may only be determined after opening suspicious products and performing tests.

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. Such counterfeit electrical products can overheat or cause short circuits and lead to fire, shock or explosion.

Following these tips can help avoid potentially dangerous counterfeit electrical products:

- Look for the CSA, UL or ETL-SEMKO certification marks. If you have concerns about the marks, contact the certifier.

- Buyers should beware of bargains that seem too good to be true. Products may be cheap because they are counterfeit or defective.
- Use established vendors who purchase their goods from legitimate distributors and genuine manufacturers. Fly-by-night vendors may not be willing to grant refunds for electrical products that do not perform as they should.
- Check the warning label. It should be free of grammatical errors and not conflict with information elsewhere on the package.
- Look for the name and contact information of the manufacturer. If this information is missing, consider purchasing electrical products elsewhere.
- Avoid no-name products.

For more information on electrical safety, visit the ESFI Web site, www.electrical-safety.org