

Suspect/Counterfeit Items & Consumer Electrical and Electronic Product Safety

Every day, counterfeit and substandard electrical products find their way into homes and businesses. Consumers may unknowingly purchase counterfeit products unaware that the products may pose significant safety risks to individuals, financial and legal liabilities to businesses, and substantial property loss in the home and workplace if left undetected.

Items that violate Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) such as counterfeit and substandard goods can pose significant safety risks to consumers by misrepresenting not only the product but also the safety standards in which they may be required to meet. For instance, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 (October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021), U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CPB) seized 27,000 shipments containing goods that violated IPR with a Manufacturers Suggested Retail Price (MSRP), if the goods had been genuine, of over \$3.3 billion. Of the items seized, 13% of the items were consumer electronics. The electronics category at CPB included electrical items such as chargers, batteries, and cables¹. In FY 2020, CPB made 26,503 seizures with an MSRP of over \$1.3 billion. Substandard and counterfeit electronic/electrical products can pose potential fire, explosion, electrocution, and shock hazards.

As a consumer, you may have heard some common misconceptions or myths about counterfeit electrical and electronic products. Below is a list of some of these myths and misconceptions, and the facts.

MYTHS	FACTS
Counterfeit electrical products will not be marked with any certifications.	Counterfeiters will use any means necessary to sell their products to consumers including marking their items, illegally, with industry accepted certifications or standards such as UL, ETL, or TUV (which are commonly found in the U.S. or Canada).
Counterfeit electrical products will not work.	Counterfeits, including electrical products often will work, but they may not work as expected. Safety and quality are unimportant to a counterfeiter who may skip adding in the important safety mechanisms that aid in keeping electrical products from overheating, catching on fire, or even from causing explosions.
Counterfeit electrical products are easy to identify.	During a test conducted by the Suspect/Counterfeit Items Program Manager in 2019, ten adults were asked if they could identify a counterfeit electrical product from a genuine one. Nine out of ten adults could <u>not</u> identify the counterfeit product. Inspection for counterfeit electrical products entails a keen attention to detail that often requires Subject Matter Level Expertise to detect the requirements that are not met or if there are differences in the marking, or conflicting, missing, or inadequate information on the product.

¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection Intellectual Property Rights Fiscal Year 2021 Seizure Statistics
<https://www.cbp.gov/trade/priority-issues/ipr? ga=2.209701905.2020537439.1652819433-2119271404.1642030424>

How can I identify a counterfeit electrical item? Inspection Tips

Quality	Label	Packaging	Documentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indications of poor workmanship (plastic shavings left in package, burrs, exposed wiring, etc.) • Doesn't meet standards or requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not standard from manufacturer • Misspellings • Grammatical errors • Poor quality • Certifications look incorrect (e.g., UL logo is crooked or looks wrong) • Conflicting information • Missing/Incorrect Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL) marking • Missing/Incorrect Manufacturer info 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not in manufacturer packaging • Not marked with manufacturer logo or incorrect logo • Not packaged appropriately to prevent damage during shipping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information incorrect, inconsistent, or conflicting • Fonts inconsistent • Alterations to certificates • Dates are inconsistent in package (if receiving certified material test reports with traceability back to original equipment manufacturers) • Documents are not signed or are signed by someone without the authority to sign

Can you identify which item is counterfeit?

Answer is at bottom of page



ITEM A



ITEM B

In March 2010, an on-duty police officer was injured when a battery (same as shown above) exploded in his flashlight. The officer sustained injuries to his hands and face. ²

What to do if you have concerns or questions?

Based on the inspection tips above or if you have any concerns that your equipment may be S/CI, work with your onsite SMEs and procurement specialists to better ensure the pedigree of the part in question. Remember, suspect electrical parts may cause immediate significant safety concerns.

S/CI Resources for DOE Employees & Contractors

- 🔑 Suspect/Counterfeit Items webpage (energy.gov)
- 🔑 Suspect/Counterfeit Powerpedia
- 🔑 Contact the S/CI SME by emailing gabrielle.holcomb@hq.doe.gov

² Counterfeit and Substandard Lithium (CR123A) Power Cell Batteries Pose Serious Health and Safety Risks to Law Enforcement Officers, Other Consumers- Los Angeles Field Office
FBI Bulletin 7 June 2012

ANSWER to *Can you identify which item is counterfeit?* Item B is counterfeit.
The item includes the following indications: misspelling of California ("Colifomia"), a missing date stamp ("10" is on left side), and the wrapper joint/seam is 180 degrees out of position.