



May 2026

Suspect/Counterfeit Items & Electrical Safety

WHAT IS THE CONCERN?

Counterfeit electrical products pose significant risks, including malfunctions, electrical shock, overheating, and short circuits. These failures can lead to equipment damage, fires, explosions, and ultimately, loss of life and substantial property damage. Beyond safety concerns, counterfeit goods harm legitimate businesses, waste consumer money, and contribute to a dangerous market, with counterfeit electronics alone accounting for a significant number of injuries and deaths annually in the U.S.¹

Reputable sources like [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#) and the [National Crime Prevention Council](#) highlight the dangers and prevalence of such items.



Suspect item (which is also from the same manufacturer as one pictured below) is missing manufacturer marking (on label and on part) and does not have typical manufacturer features such as date code, bar code, coloring, etc.

Counterfeit items aren't limited to fasteners or hardware. They also include electronics, lithium-ion batteries, circuit breakers, and many of the electrical products that we work with daily. Identifying these products can be challenging, but common indicators exist. **See examples of indicators in the figures, above and below.**

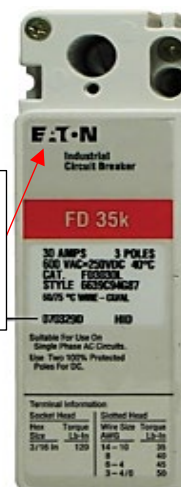
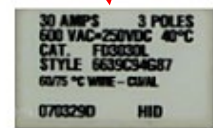
RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate the risks associated with suspect or counterfeit items, consider the following²:

- **Prior to Purchase:** For expensive items, or anything electric/rechargeable, check for recalls on [cpsc.gov/recalls](https://www.cpsc.gov/recalls) and complaints on [saferproducts.gov](https://www.saferproducts.gov). Use specific keywords for your search.
- **Country of Origin:** Examine the product label for the country of origin. Be aware that a "Made in USA" claim must adhere to the Federal Trade Commission's strict "all or virtually all" standard, meaning significant processing and component sourcing must occur within the U.S.
- **Packaging Scrutiny:** Look for errors on product packaging, such as misspellings, inconsistencies, or missing/incorrect information, which are common signs of counterfeit goods.
- **Serial Number Verification:** Cross-referencing the serial number with the manufacturer's database can help confirm authenticity.
- **Trusted Sources:** Always buy from known, reputable sellers or directly from the manufacturer. Exercise caution with unfamiliar companies and conduct thorough research before purchasing.



Genuine item has a uniform label, manufacturer name, date code, part/model numbers (style/cat), UL label is not pictured but it has a UL label



¹ (EATON, 2015)

² (Murray, U.S. PIRG, 2024)

CONCLUSION

Preventing the use of suspect and counterfeit electrical items is critical for ensuring safety, protecting property, and supporting legitimate commerce. By following these recommendations, individuals and organizations can significantly reduce their exposure to the hazards posed by these illicit products.



To report suspect or counterfeit items, always follow your organization's internal processes first. If you have concerns about potential fraud, waste, or abuse, including suspect/counterfeit items, you should also contact the Department of Energy Office of Inspector General (DOE OIG) at any time through the following methods:

- **Online:** [Submit a report anonymously here](#)
- **Email:** ig hotline@hq.doe.gov
- **Phone:** (800) 541-1625 (toll-free)

For assistance with potential suspect/counterfeit concerns, you can also email counterfeit@hq.doe.gov.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

- EATON. (2015, April 5). *4 Things you should know about counterfeits*. Retrieved from EATON [here](#).
- Murray, T. (2024, August 26). *U.S. PIRG*. Retrieved from Counterfeit products: How to tell whether you bought one. Retrieved [here](#).
- Murray, T. (2025, March 24). *Tips to shop smarter and safer and avoid hazardous products*. Retrieved from U.S. PIRG Education Fund. Retrieved [here](#).
- National Crime Prevention Council. (2021, December 17). *Shop Smart and Stay Safe This Season*. Retrieved from Shop Smart and Stay Safe This Season. Retrieved [here](#).
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (2025, November 13). *The Truth Behind Counterfeits*. Retrieved [here](#).

For further information or questions about this OPEX Awareness Notice, please contact Gabrielle Holcomb at gabrielle.holcomb@hq.doe.gov or the EHSS Office of ES&H Reporting and Analysis (EHSS-23) by email at OEC@hq.doe.gov

OPEX Awareness Notice

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