

Tis The Season Of Giving And Good Will But Also One For Criminals To Lure Unsuspecting Shoppers

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WASHINGTON — The holiday shopping season is underway and the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center) is launching a new [holiday shopping toolkit](#) to help consumers protect themselves from substandard or even hazardous counterfeit toys, electronics, cosmetics, and other products.

The holiday shopping toolkit includes online shopping do's and don'ts, ways to protect financial and banking information, educational videos and infographics, and general information on how to spot fake merchandise.

“For most, the holidays represent a season of good will and giving, but for criminals, it’s the season to lure in unsuspecting holiday shoppers,” said IPR Center Director Matt Allen. “One of the key principles of crime prevention is education, and this holiday guide ensures consumers are equipped with advice from experts on how to protect their personal financial data and avoid buying gifts that can be harmful to their loved ones.”

IPR Center partners Homeland Security Investigations, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and The Toy Association are teaming up to ensure consumers can make educated decisions when searching for the best deals this season.“

Criminals don’t take the holidays off, so it’s important for consumers to be aware of ways they can protect themselves this busy season,” said Acting Deputy Assistant Director Carlton Peebles of the FBI’s Criminal Investigative Division. “The FBI collaborates with our law enforcement and private sector partners at the IPR Center year-round to combat the sale of counterfeit goods, which threaten public health and safety and impose high costs to the U.S. economy. Everyone can help identify and thwart counterfeiters, and this year, we encourage the public to use our holiday shopping toolkit to avoid becoming a scammer’s next victim.”

What’s the risk of buying counterfeit products? Counterfeit electronics can overheat and explode, bicycle helmets can break upon impact, phony cosmetics and health care products can be made with dangerous or unsanitary ingredients that should not be applied to the skin, and seasonal items for the home, like holiday lights, can be poorly wired and ignite fires.

Counterfeit goods not only cheat the consumer with substandard and potentially hazardous products, but the website's users can also put shoppers at risk of having their personal and financial data stolen for other nefarious purposes. Online shopping is particularly vulnerable to scams that trick the user into buying counterfeit and pirated goods.

“When it comes to fake toys, there are significant safety concerns,” said Steve Pasierb, president & CEO of The Toy Association. “Counterfeit and knockoff toys sold by un reputable sellers are highly unlikely to comply with strict toy safety laws that are designed to protect children at play. These fake, non-compliant products might have small parts that can break off, may not be age-graded appropriately or may pose other risks to children. When shopping online, families need to carefully scrutinize listings, and purchase only from reputable sellers and known brands, whose legitimate toys comply with the more than 100 different safety standards and tests required by law.”

Among the tips the IPR Center is providing for holiday shopping:

- Purchase goods only from reputable retailers and be wary of third-party vendors.
- Read product reviews on websites and research companies you aren't familiar with.
- Check seller reviews and verify there is a working phone number and address for the seller, in case you have questions about the legitimacy of a product.
- If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Don't buy expensive items from third-party websites.
- Take advantage of security features. Passwords and other security tools add layers of protection if used appropriately.
- Check privacy policies. Take precautions when providing information, and make sure to check published privacy policies to see how a company will use or distribute your information.
- Check your statements. Keep a record of your purchases and copies of confirmation pages and compare them to your bank statements. If there is a discrepancy, report it immediately.

Sold online and in stores, counterfeit goods hurt the U.S. economy, cost Americans their jobs, threaten consumer health and safety, and fund criminal activity. Every year, the U. S. government seizes millions of counterfeit goods from countries around the world, worth billions of dollars, as part of its mission to protect U.S. businesses, as well as the health and safety of consumers.

“Fake goods pose real dangers to your health and safety and jeopardize the U.S. economy,” said AnnMarie Highsmith, Executive Assistant Commissioner of CBP’s Office of Trade. “Between October 1, 2020, and July of this year, CBP made 22,849 seizures worth \$2.5 billion. That’s \$2.5 billion dollars in legitimate revenue that have been taken from the pockets of law-abiding American businesses to line the pockets of criminals and criminal organizations.”

The [IPR Center](#), working collaboratively with its 27 public and private sector partners, stands at the forefront of the United States government's response to combatting global intellectual property theft and enforcing intellectual properties rights violations. The IPR Center was established to combat global intellectual property theft and, accordingly, has a significant role in policing the sale and distribution of counterfeit goods on websites, social media, and the dark web.

These efforts protect U.S. industry, the U.S. consumer, and the safety of the American public from the adverse economic impact and health dangers posed by introducing counterfeit products into U.S. commerce.

To report IP theft or to learn more about the IPR Center, visit IPRCenter.gov.