

Crackdown on Counterfeit Merchandise

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Counterfeit consumer goods, commonly called knock-offs, are counterfeit or imitation products offered for sale. The spread of counterfeit goods has become global in recent years and the range of goods subject to infringement has increased significantly.

[According to estimates by the Counterfeiting Intelligence Bureau \(CIB\)](#) of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), counterfeit goods make up 5 to 7% of world trade.[1] A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that up to \$200 billion of international trade could have been for counterfeit and pirated goods in 2005,[2] and around \$250 billion in 2007.[3][4] Other estimates conclude that a more accurate figure is closer to \$600 billion lost, since the OECD estimates do not include online sales or goods counterfeited and sold within the same country.[3]

Fort Lauderdale Swap Shop - [Reported by Ihosvani Rodriguez, Sun Sentinel.](#)

An international crackdown on counterfeit merchandise on sale for the holidays, from fake Louis Vuitton purses to phony Dora the Explorer wristwatches, brought federal agents to the Fort Lauderdale Swap Shop, where a raid resulted in thousands of items being seized and clues that investigators hope will lead them to the illegal manufacturers, [reported by Ihosvani Rodriguez, Sun Sentinel.](#)

"This is all part of major organized crime," said Camen Pino, head of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in South Florida. "It's not just one person with a suitcase in a corner selling fake watches. Every time you buy one of these items, you are helping organized crime."

Globally, the six-week campaign, made public Thursday, targeted flea markets, retail stores, seaports and land ports of entry between Nov. 1 and Dec. 9 in 66 cities in the United States, 55 cities in Mexico and Seoul, South Korea. U.S. agents rounded up a total of about 327,000 bogus items with a genuine retail price of about \$76 million.

About 90 percent of the counterfeit goods confiscated in South Florida were collected during a Dec. 13 raid at the popular Lauderhill flea market, Pino told a news conference in Miami-Dade County. Those items would've sold for \$300,000 had they been the real thing, he said.

The phony goods included designer sneakers, sunglasses, blouses, purses and shoes, a Hello Kitty shirt and a Miami Dolphins jersey with the name and number of wide receiver Brandon Marshall. There were dozens of colorful SpongeBob SquarePants timepieces, and a fake G-Shock watch priced at \$30, less than a third of what the genuine article goes for.

"Everyone is looking for a bargain this holiday season, but if you see something that is too good to be true, then it really is," said Pino.

Officials said the counterfeit goods hurt legitimate manufacturers and retailers and ultimately rip off consumers by delivering them sub-standard products. Explaining why the crackdown was timed to coincide with the year-end holidays, ICE Assistant Special Agent in Charge Gerard O'Neill, who oversaw the Swap Shop raid, said counterfeiters were banking on the enormous demand for consumer products at the time of year to exploit as many buyers as possible.

"It's a time when all of us are looking to stretch our dollars," O'Neill said. "In the end, you are buying a product that may not last as long. So you are not really getting your dollar's worth."

At the news conference, federal and Broward Sheriff's Office investigators unveiled about two dozen boxes containing more than 2,800 counterfeit items seized in South Florida as part of the crackdown, codenamed Operation Holiday Hoax II.

Undercover federal agents and deputies with the Broward Sheriff's Office purchased samples of the suspect items at the Swap Shop late last month. The items were then sent to the manufacturer to verify their authenticity, or lack thereof. Agents and deputies then swooped into the popular flea market and impounded enough counterfeit merchandise to load up a box truck, said Pino.

Swap Shop owner Preston Henn told the Sun Sentinel on Thursday that he discourages vendors at the sprawling facility on Sunrise Boulevard west of Interstate 95 from selling knockoffs. But with about 5,000 vendors hawking thousands of different items each day, it would be impossible to patrol for counterfeits, he said.

"Can you spot a fake Omega watch?" Henn said. "I sure can't."

Vendors of the fake items were not arrested, but investigators hope the street-level peddlers will lead them to higher-level counterfeiters, smugglers and manufacturers.

Fraud Criminal Defense

If you are convicted of fraud by counterfeiting money, you could be facing up to 15 years in prison, hefty fines, confiscation of property, and paying restitution. If you have been accused of a crime, a [South Florida criminal defense attorney](#) can help you.

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