



TIPS TO SPOT COUNTERFEIT TOYS BEFORE YOU BUY THEM

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As the holidays grow near, shoppers can expect a more difficult time finding the perfect gift this year that will arrive in time for the holidays. With supply chain issues plaguing the holiday shopping season, consumers should be wary when shopping online that what they purchase is a safe, legitimate product.

When shopping for children, counterfeit toys can be very dangerous. Consumer advocates and government agencies have worked hard to ensure toys undergo thorough safety testing. If that safety testing is not done, children can be exposed to choking hazards, toxics and sharp parts that could cause injury.

If you've looked high and low for a toy that's already been sold out, don't trust the toy that pops up in its place online. A great deal isn't always the safest deal.

Spotting counterfeits can be difficult for anyone. Here is a breakdown of what to look for when shopping online for toys:

The website listing can tell you a lot. When looking at a toy's product description, watch out for misspellings or mislabelings. Website listings with low-quality pictures of toys can also indicate a counterfeit.

Look at age recommendations. Age recommendations for toys can be listed differently throughout a website listing. The age in the title may not be the same as the manufacturer's recommended age. If there isn't a clear age range, it's best to avoid buying the toy.

Learn more about the product from the seller information. When shopping on websites that host third-party sellers, you can access the seller's information:

- On Amazon, you can select the seller's name under "Buy Now."
- On eBay, you can click the seller's name under "Seller Information."
- On Walmart, a product sold by a third-party has the seller name listed next to "Sold and shipped by."

Take an in-depth look at the seller information. Clicking on the seller's information can tell you what other items they sell, where the business is located and feedback on its products. If they sell a hodgepodge of other products in addition to toys, it may not be a reputable toy seller.

You can reach out to the seller. If you have questions about the authenticity of the product, you can reach out to the seller with questions. If they don't respond, it's a good indicator the toy listing was for a counterfeit product.

Low prices don't mean it's a good deal. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce (USCC) and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) cautions consumers to watch out for products that are selling for cheaper than other items in the same category. When using a website that has third-party sellers, comparing listings for similar toys can be a good way to identify what the average price should be.

Do an internet search on the seller. An internet search can lead you to the seller's website if they sell their products on both their website and a platform that hosts third-party sellers. You can also see if a seller has listings on other websites that have third-party sellers and compare the listings to see any discernible differences.

Don't trust everything on social media. Consumers should be wary of posts or targeted ad campaigns. A report by the United States Trade Representative (USTR) says that posts and ad campaigns can be a "fast, easy, inexpensive and common tactic" that are used to fool customers into buying counterfeit and pirated products.

Realize not all reviews are trustworthy. PIRG Education Fund listed tips on the best way to differentiate between fake and real reviews.

Shop from the real store. If there is a question about a toy's authenticity, shop from the brand's website. Major toy manufacturers and brands — Hasbro Gaming, LEGO, Barbie — have verified accounts with Amazon that can help determine the toy's credibility.

When you receive the product, take a look at the packaging. The USCC and CPSC recommend scrutinizing the labels, packaging and contents. If the packaging has anything suspicious, like a broken safety seal, it could be a counterfeit product. While a counterfeit toy may be difficult to spot online, there could be differences in quality that are more visible when the toy is received in the mail.

Finally: Report any bad experiences. If you believe you've purchased a counterfeit toy, or any knockoff product, you can report it to www.saferproducts.gov or call the CPSC at 800-638-2772.