

October 2021

## Halloween & Counterfeit Cosmetic Products

If Halloween costume plans include applying cosmetic products to yourself or your kids, consider these facts and tips from the DOE Suspect/Counterfeit Items Program

### Why Are Counterfeit Cosmetic Products So Dangerous?

Counterfeit cosmetic<sup>1</sup> products pose a direct safety risk to users as these products often are found to contain excessive irritants and even poisonous elements such as arsenic, cadmium, mercury, lead and even various strains of bacteria. With the increase in online sales of cosmetic products, this has given a rise to the counterfeit cosmetic products market. In a 2018 GAO [report](#) (GAO 18-216) they found 100% of the cosmetics procured from online e-warehouse sites were counterfeit. This is a significant finding for those that may be buying their cosmetic products online and not directly from the manufacturer or brand owner of that product as the likelihood of receiving a counterfeit is extremely high.



The women above had serious reactions to counterfeit eyelash glue.

Picture courtesy of "[Why Cheap Makeup is Hurting Us](#)" - Bodymatters Admin (October 15, 2017)

### Below are some potential red flags of suspect/counterfeit cosmetic products:

- ☹️ Brand name cosmetics priced very low.
- ☹️ Labels have uneven fonts, misspellings, inconsistent patterns or language, incorrect manufacturer logos, and conflicting or incorrect information.
- ☹️ Packaging is low quality (notice mirrors don't fit well or sponge tipped applicators are provided when they normally are not).
- ☹️ The quality of the product is low (i.e., chalky, color is thinner, or lacks its signature scent).
- ☹️ Cosmetic products purchased from a third-party source, not an approved distributor of the manufacturer. This increases the likelihood of receiving a counterfeit product.



In this example from the Department of Homeland Security (read full article [here](#)), a Michigan teen was left partially blind in one eye after wearing a pair of cosmetic contacts during Halloween.

What was supposed to be part of a fun Halloween costume for the 17-year-old and her friends, all dressing up as zombies with creepy contact lenses, turned into real safety and health hazard.

Picture Courtesy of ICE.gov (January 20, 2021)









<sup>1</sup> [Cosmetic Products | FDA](#)

## How to buy?

- 🛒 Buy cosmetics directly from the manufacturer or the authorized distributors listed on their website.
- 🛒 Be cautious of vendors that sell an odd variety of goods (e.g., they sell cosmetic products and electronics).
- 🛒 Don't buy from third-party sources on e-warehouse sites (i.e., eBay, Amazon, Walmart, etc.) that have no contact information, do not have their own external website separate from the e-warehouse site, and offer no return or warranty policy.

### Indications You Can Look For! The 4 P's

Examples are from Spot the Not! *How to Compare Fake vs Real Makeup* by Ella Roque (July 23, 2020)

Price		Packaging/Labeling	
<b>FAKE: \$7 each</b> 	<b>REAL: \$21 each</b> 	<b>FAKE: Bullet is bigger. shade name is on a sticker on the lid</b> 	<b>REAL: Bullet is more compact. shade name is on the lid</b> 
Pigments		Product Quality	
<b>FAKE: Lighter hue than original</b> 	<b>REAL: Darker and more pigmented</b> 	<b>FAKE: Chalky powder is broken quickly</b> 	<b>REAL: Stays intact and good quality overall</b> 

### Resources for DOE Employees & Contractors

- 📄 Suspect/Counterfeit Items [webpage](https://www.energy.gov/sce/counterfeit-items) (energy.gov)
- 📄 Suspect/Counterfeit Powerpedia [website](https://www.energy.gov/powerpedia)
- 📄 Contact the S/CI SME by emailing [gabrielle.holcomb@hq.doe.gov](mailto:gabrielle.holcomb@hq.doe.gov)

### Resources for General Consumers

- 📄 [Stopfakes.gov](https://www.stopfakes.gov)
- 📄 Federal Trade Commission (FTC) - [Scam Alerts](https://www.ftc.gov/scam-alerts)
- 📄 Better Business Bureau (BBB) - [Scam Tracker](https://www.bbb.org/scam-tracker)