



## European Consumer News

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November's eBulletin discusses counterfeit goods and how to avoid nasty surprises when you order bargains online. If you have a problem with a purchase from another European country, please contact us on 01 8090600 or [click here](#). For information on your consumer rights in Europe, see [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie)

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### **Too good to be true?**

These days everyone is looking for a bargain and shopping online can offer consumers greater choice and value. But what happens if you come across a site offering desirable designer gear at knock-down prices? Before you press the buy button you should bear in mind the following:

If the site claims to have cut-price designer goods in all styles and colours how likely is it that these goods are really what they claim to be? Research in the UK shows that there has been a 400% increase in the number of counterfeit goods seized there over the last 10 years while in Ireland, to take just one product area, imports of counterfeit cosmetic products are up 60% on last year. Many of these products enter the country because they have been ordered online by consumers who believe that they are ordering the real products that these counterfeits imitate.

Counterfeit goods may look like a bargain but they can pose a serious risk to health and safety. Poor quality electrical goods can cause fires and electrocution, while fake makeup tested by the HSE was found to contain toxins such as cadmium and lead. The sites that sell these counterfeit goods are run by criminal gangs and ordering from them exposes you to the risk of having your credit card compromised. So given that it is extremely simple to clone a legitimate website in order to sell fake products, what can you do to avoid fakes if you intend to shop online?

- Choose shopping websites carefully. Try to shop on a familiar or recommended site and make sure you have the name and full contact details, including postal address, of the web trader so you know who you are dealing with. Remember it is the trader's legal obligation to provide these details.
- Beware of sites that have only recently been set up. Setting up a copycat website to sell fake goods only takes a few minutes and these sites come and go very quickly. Often they are only recently registered but may claim to have been round for a while. Use the Howard Online Shopping Assistant tool on [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie) to find out when, and where, the site was registered and other background information.

- Don't assume that a website is based in the country indicated by its web address. For example, just because the address ends in '.ie' does not necessarily mean the website is based in Ireland. Many counterfeit websites seek to appear as though they are based in Europe to gain consumer trust but are in fact based elsewhere, particularly in Asia. Be on the look out for poor spelling or grammar and if in doubt check out and verify the physical address and phone number.
- Ensure the site is secure by looking for a padlock symbol in the bottom right of the browser window and for the website address to begin with 'https://'. Always use a secure method of payment, such as a credit card. Never send cash or use a money-wiring service because you'll have no recourse if something goes wrong.
- For more information see [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie)

**I ordered a designer dress online but when it arrived it did not look like I expected and when I tried it on, it did not suit me. In fact, the dress was of such poor quality I now suspect that it may have been a fake. I no longer want this dress and it was very expensive. What can I do?**

When you buy goods online from a website based in the EU, you enjoy a seven working day "cooling off" period during which you can return any purchases without having to give a reason. Simply inform the seller in writing that you wish to cancel your order and they must give you a refund within 30 days. Unless the product is faulty or not as described, you will have to cover the cost of returning the goods. If the dress you bought in good faith is established to be counterfeit you should not incur any costs in returning it to the seller as item was not 'as described'. However, enforcing these rights in practice may be virtually impossible if the seller is engaged in criminal activity, so you can expect little concern for consumer law. In these instances, you may wish to report the matter to the manufacturer, or to [www.eConsumer.gov](http://www.eConsumer.gov), the portal for consumers to report complaints about online and related transactions with foreign companies, and the Gardaí. This type of criminality is within the remit of the Anti-Racketeering Unit of the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

If you have difficulties obtaining a full refund from the seller and you paid by credit card, contact your card issuer immediately to see if you can recover your money through a "chargeback" scheme.

**If you want more information about this or any other cross-border consumer issue you can contact us on 01 8090600 or at [www.eccireland.ie](http://www.eccireland.ie)**

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