



With no legal regulation and very little recourse, we all are at risk when buying unsafe and ineffective products that might have been counterfeited. As a crime which touches virtually everyone in one way or another, counterfeit goods pose a serious risk to consumer health and safety, as faulty counterfeit goods can lead to injury and, in some cases, death.

For instance, fraudulent medicines present a serious health risk to consumers. Criminal activity in this area is big business: the sale of fraudulent medicines from East Asia and the Pacific to South-East Asia and Africa alone amounts to some \$5 billion per year. At the very least, fraudulent medicines have been found to contain no active ingredients, while at their worst they can contain unknown and potentially harmful chemicals.

Tyres, brake pads and airbags, aeroplane parts, electrical consumer goods, baby formula and children's toys are just some other examples of the many different items which have been counterfeited.

A wide range of ethical issues can also be overlooked when considering the impact of

counterfeiting. Labour exploitation, with workers facing safety and security concerns, migrant smuggling, or serious threat to endangered species and environmental pollution are a couple of examples of what may lie behind the scenes.

A new global campaign by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ( [UNODC](#) ) was launched today to raise awareness among consumers of the \$250 billion a year illicit trafficking of counterfeit goods.

The campaign, called “Counterfeits: Don’t buy into organized crime“ aims to inform consumers that buying counterfeit goods could be funding organized criminal groups, put consumer health and safety at risk and contribute to other ethical and environmental concerns.

As UNODC’s Executive Director Yury Fedotov notes, “In comparison to other crimes such as drug trafficking, the production and distribution of counterfeit goods present a low-risk/high-profit opportunity for criminals. Counterfeiting feeds money laundering activities and encourages corruption. There is also evidence of some involvement or overlap with drug trafficking and other serious crimes.”

Criminal groups use similar routes and modi operandi to move counterfeit goods as they do to smuggle illicit drugs, firearms and people. In 2013, the joint UNODC / World Customs Organization Container Control Programme (CCP) detected counterfeit goods in more than one-third of the seized containers, despite being set up initially to intercept drugs.