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Seizures of Fake Products Reach New Statistical Highs in U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Customs and Border Patrol Says

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With the holiday season ending, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have reiterated their consumer alert for counterfeit and pirated goods with regard to online shopping.

Amidst the pandemic, a recent fiscal year comparison reveals that CBP officers and import specialists have witnessed significant statistical increases in the seizures of products that violate Intellectual Property Regulations (IPR), according to a release CBP issued Tuesday.

The San Juan Field Office, which is responsible for multiple ports of entry in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, experienced a 175 percent growth in the number of fake product seizures in

Fiscal Year 2021 to date in contrast to the same period in Fiscal Year 2020.

“Brand products that are incredibly cheap online might not be the real deal,” said Leida Colon, assistant director of field operations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. “If the price of the product seems too good to be true, it probably is; and that can cause real problems to you, your family, and legitimate businesses.”

According to the release, every year, CBP seizes millions of counterfeit goods from countries around the world as part of its mission to protect U.S. businesses and consumers. These goods include fake versions of popular products such as smartphones and related accessories, electronics, apparel, shoes, cosmetics, and high-end luxury goods.

Sold online and in stores, counterfeit goods hurt the U.S. economy, cost Americans their jobs, threaten consumer health and safety, and fund criminal activity, CBP said. There are several steps that, as a consumer, you can take to protect yourself when shopping online. These steps include purchasing goods only from reputable retailers and being wary of third-party vendors. Check seller reviews, verify that there is a working phone number, and address for the seller, in case you have questions about the legitimacy of a product.

In Fiscal Year 2020, CBP seized 26,503 shipments nationwide, which contained goods that violated intellectual property rights, the CBP release stated. The total estimated value of the seized goods, had they been genuine, was nearly \$1.3 billion. In Fiscal Year 2020, the CBP San Juan Field Office seized 2,443 shipments containing goods that violated intellectual property rights, which had an overall estimated MSRP value of \$46 million.

To detect and deter these imports of counterfeit products, Puerto Rico created the San Juan Trade Enforcement Team. Since its inception in 2016, the group has seized 1,064,098 items with an estimated MSRP of \$163,477,809. The top ten categories of items seized during FY-2020 are, in descending order:

1. Purses/Wallets
2. Jewelry
3. Footwear
4. Electronics
5. Alcoholic Beverages
6. Watches
7. Clothing
8. Other Counterfeit Goods
9. Cigarettes
10. Prescription drugs

CBP said it has also established an educational initiative to raise consumer awareness about the consequences and dangers associated with purchasing counterfeit and pirated goods online or in stores. More information about that initiative is available at www.cbp.gov/fakegoodsrealdangers.

If you have any information regarding suspected fraud or illegal trade activity, contact CBP through the [e-Allegations Online Trade Violation Reporting System](#) or by calling 1-800-BE-ALERT. Intellectual property rights violations can also be reported to the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center at <https://www.iprcenter.gov/referral/> or by telephone at 1-866-IPR-2060.

For more information about protecting yourself from counterfeit and pirated goods, visit <https://www.stopfakes.gov/>.

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