RETAILER GUIDANCE ON ILLEGAL TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL

Retailers are reminded to ensure the tobacco and alcoholic spirits they sell are genuine and legal.

Counterfeit and illegal tobacco and alcohol is an increasing problem and harms everyone from honest shop-keepers to the unwitting consumers whose health is put at risk from adulterated product.

Enforcement by Trading Standards Services and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is increasing in order to achieve and maintain a fair and safe trading environment for all.

**NOTE**

If stock is found either to be counterfeit or to not have had duty paid on it then it may be seized and on-the-spot fines can be issued. You may also face prosecution or, in the case of alcohol, have your licence reviewed.

Possible indicators of illegal products include:
- supplies offered via unsolicited e-mails or fliers,
- lack of detail about the identity of the supplier,
- goods offered at unfeasibly low prices,
- a supplier who insists on dealing only in cash,
- the absence of a valid purchase invoice,
- absence of duty stamps on alcoholic spirits.

**REMEMBER**

- be careful when purchasing products – only purchase from recognised and reputable sources.
- remind all staff to check products upon delivery and unpacking – look at the products to see if they appear authentic.
- be careful if somebody requests a refund or to return a product - check the product thoroughly in case it has been swapped for an illegal one.

The dangers of counterfeit cigarettes and alcohol

Not only are counterfeit cigarettes and alcohol inferior to the real thing, they are often more dangerous too.

Counterfeit cigarettes regularly contain much higher levels of nicotine than genuine brands and produce more harmful carbon monoxide. They also incorporate seriously unhealthy mixes of cancer-causing chemicals including arsenic, benzene and formaldehyde – far greater than genuine cigarettes.

Counterfeit alcoholic drinks can be dangerous and contain high levels of methanol, a chemical that can cause liver damage, breathing difficulties, coma and even death.
How to spot counterfeit cigarettes and alcohol

- Spelling mistakes and altered logos - counterfeit cigarettes and alcohol products often imitate popular and well-known brands but have subtle differences or mistakes. The most copied counterfeit cigarettes include Benson & Hedges, Lambert & Butler, Camel, Embassy and Golden Virginia Tobacco.
- Low quality labels and packaging.
- Foreign safety warnings or no health warnings at all, are indicators of counterfeit or illegal cigarettes - all packets of cigarettes, cigars and hand rolling tobacco require a colour warning (photo or text) on the packet:

Alcohol Duty Stamps

The UK Duty Stamps Scheme has been in effect since 2006 and is aimed at tackling spirits duty fraud. The presence of a Stamp indicates that tax has either been paid or is due to be paid on the contents of the bottle, to which it is attached.

The Duty Stamps Scheme applies to bottles of spirits and fortified wine e.g. port, which have a strength of 30% ABV or more, and which are in 35 centilitre bottles or larger.

The duty stamp is a 25mm diameter roundel:

Alcohol duty fraud is where goods scheduled for sale abroad are diverted back into UK shops and is often perceived to be a victimless crime with only the taxman losing out. However not only is the tax revenue lost, but it creates an unfair trading environment where honest shop keepers struggle to compete and survive.

If you require any further advice or information, or you wish to report suspicious tobacco or alcohol, then please contact:

Trading Standards Service, Civic Centre South, John Dickie Street, Kilmarnock, KA1 1HW. Telephone Number 01563 576602.
Email: trading.standards@east-ayrshire.gov.uk.