



Food Fraud Prevention THINK TANK

Primer on Consumer Product Fraud Prevention

This **primer for consumers to avoid product fraud** was created by the Food Fraud Prevention Think Tank to provide actionable and straightforward prevention steps. Since product fraud is getting harder to detect, the most critical step for consumers is to realize when they are vulnerable and how to take precautions in those sensitive situations. These five simple questions help reduce the fraud opportunity, and are summarized in one word each in the “5 Word Survey.”

Food Fraud is deception for economic gain using food. Consumers have become more aware and concerned. Recent incidents that have raised concerns from the USA, to Europe, to China include melamine in infant formula and pet food, horsemeat in beef, peanut allergens in cumin, methanol in vodka, and others. Consumers want and need some help in avoiding Food Fraud and counterfeits.

Consumer Questions to reduce their vulnerability – to reduce the fraud opportunity:

1. **PRODUCT: What type of product? Be especially careful of what you put in you, on you, or plug into the wall**
 - Counterfeit or substandard foods, medicines, or creams could be an irritant or toxic.
 - Remember the exploding Samsung Note devices? Those were manufactured under extremely high tech and good manufacturing practices. If you buy Christmas tree lights at a flea market, consider the quality control if they are counterfeits.
2. **QUALITY: Would you recognize a variation in quality from a substandard or counterfeit product?**
 - For a product – \$300 bottle of wine, Kobe beef, a prescription medicine pill, a replacement car air bag, a replacement basement sump pump, an anti-aging facial lotion – would you be able to distinguish between a generic and premium product? What about from a premium to a super-premium product? If you cannot readily identify the difference between a high- and low-quality product then you are vulnerable to product fraud.
3. **SUPPLIER: What is your relationship with the supplier/ retailer?**
 - Have you had previous experience with this supplier? Have you bought a lot of products from this supplier and had a good experience? Have they been respected and in business for many years, or are they new?
4. **ONLINE: What is your relationship with the online supplier -- or did you find them from a reputable source?**
 - a. Beyond just considering a supplier, there are additional vulnerabilities from a remote, online supplier.
 - b. Responding to a spam marketing email or even an open internet search is risky – companies can make their websites look very legitimate. Think of the spam emails that appear to come from your bank or employer.
5. **COMPLAIN: Complain to the supplier or retailer! If they're legit, they will want to know (remember to save a sample!)**
 - a. A reputable retailer is usually also a victim of product fraud. They would be terrified that their products could be fraudulent. It could be catastrophic if the local premium wine and cheese store gets a reputation for being a rip-off or a Fortune 500 company's stock plummets \$100s of millions in value.
 - b. Complain and return the product – BUT keep a sample for yourself. If you do not get a satisfactory response, complain to the brand owner or the local health department.

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www.FoodFraudPrevention.com

