



How to avoid counterfeit E

The Institute of Measurement and Control Explosive Atmospheres Special Interest Group (Ex-SIG) aims to promote good practice and support continuing professional development in the Ex discipline through a range of activities and publications. The group produces briefing notes to help inform members on key topics. This article is one such briefing note on counterfeit Ex goods.

(Ex-SIG Briefing Notes are first released to members of the SIG before being made publicly available.)

Unfortunately, the global supply chain providing equipment for use in potentially explosive atmospheres (Ex rated

equipment), is just as susceptible to counterfeit goods as any other but with the added risk of there being potentially catastrophic consequences as a result!

Manufacturers of counterfeit, fraudulent or non-compliant goods are becoming ever more sophisticated in their attempts to supply such equipment and despite efforts of certification schemes such as ATEX, UKEX and IECEx to prevent these dangerous goods entering the global supply chain, the responsibility for ensuring that fully compliant equipment is sourced, falls squarely on the shoulder of the purchaser – so, very much a case of ‘Buyer Beware’!

Whilst there is no ‘silver bullet’ to

guarantee protection from such fraudulent activities, taking the following steps can at least reduce the likelihood that you, or your procurement professionals fall victim to buying non-compliant goods.

Research the manufacturer

Investigate the website or platform where you plan to make your purchase. Reputable e-commerce platforms and official brand websites are generally safer options, but this does not necessarily guarantee the goods for sale are ATEX/UKEX/IECEx compliant.

Look for customer reviews and ratings. Be cautious if the seller has a limited

Ex goods

online presence or if all reviews seem suspiciously positive. Be especially cautious if the equipment being purchased originates from countries renowned for supplying fraudulent, fake, or counterfeit goods.

Verify authenticity

Check that an Ex certificate is available and appears to be genuine. Request a copy of the cert before purchasing. If a manufacturer is unwilling or slow to provide an Ex certificate, this may well indicate a problem.

If there is an IECEX certificate, in addition to an ATEX certificate, confirm it is genuine by checking the online IECEX certificate database on their website.

Price/spec awareness

If the price is significantly lower, or the spec much higher than other similar products on the market, alarm bells should start ringing. If something looks too good to be true, chances are, it is!

Only purchase from authorised/reputable retailers

Wherever possible, source equipment from authorised distributors and retailers from your country/region who will have a vested interest in ensuring the goods supplied to market are genuine and safe to use in potentially explosive atmospheres.

Payment methods

Use secure payment methods, avoiding wire transfer or cash transactions. Ensure credit checks and due diligence has been carried out before purchasing goods from a new supplier.

Seek expert advice

Ex equipment is a very specialised and highly regulated manufacturing and supply chain, so if in doubt, ask an expert to review the Ex concept marking and certificate.

Authentic equipment that has been certified by a genuine notified body, follows a stringent and consistent method of Ex labelling (marking). Fraudulent equipment can sometimes be identified by errors in the format of the marking or the structure of the certificate, something an expert might spot, that might otherwise be missed by the untrained eye.

Educate yourself

Be aware of what you are buying. The supply chain for personal and mobile equipment items such as Ex phones, tablets, and computers is particularly susceptible to fraudulent equipment being placed on the market, so be even more vigilant when purchasing such goods.

If in the UK, review the UK Trading Standards website and the EU Safety Gate website for the most up-to-date list of goods currently being sold, that are known to be fraudulent but possibly still being sold.

Report suspicious items

If you are based in the UK and you become

aware of goods that are counterfeit, non-compliant or plainly fraudulent, report the UK distributor, and the manufacturer, to UK Trading Standards. If a fake Ex cert has been created, inform the notified body whose name has been used, so that they too can raise awareness of it.

We can all play a part, however small, in ensuring equipment intended for potentially hazardous areas is suitable for use. By following the simple guidance above, having an awareness that counterfeit Ex equipment exists and is widely available, and by remaining vigilant when purchasing such goods, together we can reduce the numbers of counterfeit goods that end up in such hazardous environments, a small step in making our industry a safer place to work. ■

This document is distributed by the Ex-SIG as an information service to the SIG membership. No guarantee is made by the institute or the author(s) concerning the accuracy, reliability or completeness of the information provided. This document should not be construed as providing advice. Readers should satisfy themselves of the applicability of the information provided. Readers make use of the information provided at their own risk.

About the author



Tal Hopkins is Technical Director and MD at Vital Ex Engineering Ltd and has over 30 years' experience delivering turnkey EC&I projects in COMAH establishments and high hazard industries. In addition to undertaking Hazardous Area Classifications and DSEAR Risk Assessments, Tal is a qualified CompEx Peripatetic Instructor and TUV certified Functional Safety Expert.