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PRESS RELEASE

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Have a REAL happy Christmas, don't buy fakes!

As the shopping frenzy is gathering pace ahead of Christmas, industry, trading standards and the government have joined forces to warn consumers of the various dangers posed by fake products.

In this difficult economic climate money is tight for many of us, but there could be a high price to pay for bargain presents that aren't the real deal. The criminal trade in fakes has proven links with other organised crime and undermines legitimate businesses, especially when the fakers gear up for the festive season.

Millions of low-quality counterfeit products are flooding the country in time for Christmas, particularly in markets, car boot sales and online. Criminals will deliberately copy well-known brands - sometimes even charging a similar price – but beware, these fakes can pose a serious risk to consumers' safety.

The external appearance and packaging of electrical goods such as chargers and hair straighteners may be copied fairly well, but the internal composition and materials are likely to be botched and could make the item very dangerous.

Fakes which shoppers are particularly warned about this Christmas are:

- mobile phones, and their accessories
- ghd hair straighteners – can be electrically unsafe and potentially life-threatening
- Nintendo DS Lite consoles – the charger could be dangerous
- video games - often contain viruses
- children's clothing – may be flammable or have hazardous fastenings

¹ Intellectual Property Office is an operating name of the Patent Office

- children’s toys and action figures, which may have loose parts or contain toxic materials.
- perfumes, cosmetics and personal care items
- alcoholic drinks – high levels of methanol can be lethal
- cigarettes – added health risks from excessive levels of tar and contamination with other substances
- Christmas lights and batteries

Intellectual property experts are offering the following top tips to help consumers be prepared this Christmas: think price, place and packaging.

PRICE:

- Always beware of offers that seem too good to be true - they probably are.

PLACE:

- Shoppers should be extra vigilant at markets, discount stores and car boot sales. A new campaign - The Real Deal – which is supported by the Trading Standards Institute, has been developed to help consumers choose markets and stalls that have been vetted by trading standards. Markets covered by the Real Deal charter can be found at www.realdealmarkets.co.uk
- If you are shopping online, watch out for unfamiliar sites. Main areas of risk are auction sites and entirely fake websites. It is always best to stick to familiar brand-name or retailer websites. You can also use search engines to research a website to see if people have had problems with them. Shoppers should be aware that a site ending .co.uk does not mean the trader is based in the UK. A seller based abroad can often be impossible to trace.

PACKAGING:

- Poor quality packaging with mis-spelled words, or no origin or safety marks, is a tell-tale sign of a fake.

For further advice on your rights contact Consumer Direct, a government-backed telephone and online consumer advice service that works in partnership with the local authority trading standards services, on www.consumerdirect.gov.uk or 08454 04 05 06.

If you have any information on IP crime please contact the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Notes to editors:

For further information and for interviews please contact:

Trading Standards Institute press office on 08456089430 or pressoffice@tsi.org.uk

Intellectual Property press office on 01633814326 or communications@ipo.gov.uk

To highlight the risks, the Electrical Safety Council (ESC) has launched a campaign about the dangers and pitfalls of purchasing unsafe electrical goods on the internet. Additionally, the ESC's Guide to Internet Shopping, available soon from their website and in leaflet form, offers practical advice to consumers – visit: www.esc.org.uk.

The Trading Standards Institute has represented the interests of Trading Standards professionals since 1881. We have a long history of ensuring that the views of our members are well represented at the highest level of government. TSI members are engaged in delivering frontline trading standards services in local authorities in response to 2 million consumer and business complaints and enquiries each year. www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

The Intellectual Property Office is within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and responsible for the national framework of Intellectual Property rights, comprising patents, designs, trade marks and copyright. Its role is to help manage an IP system that encourages innovation and creativity, balances the needs of consumers and users, promotes strong and competitive markets and is the foundation of the knowledge based economy.

The Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association (ELSPA) represents all the major publishers of games in the UK. Founded in 1989 to establish a specific and collective identity for the country's interactive leisure software industry, membership includes companies publishing and distributing leisure software in the UK. ELSPA works with members and media to illustrate the beneficial contributions that the UK videogames industry makes to the British economy as well as its influence in other industries.

The Alliance Against Intellectual Property (IP) Theft is a UK-based coalition of 20 trade associations and enforcement organisations with an interest in ensuring intellectual property rights receive the protection they need and deserve. Our members work closely with trading standards and local police forces to reduce the harm caused by intellectual property crime in local communities and to ensure that legitimate businesses and traders are able to operate fairly.

The Anti-Counterfeiting Group (ACG) was founded in the UK in 1980 with 18 members, mostly in the automotive industry; it now has over 150 members globally, operating in, or providing specialist advice to, most industry sectors where counterfeiting is an issue. ACG campaigns against the trade in fakes on behalf of consumers and legitimate business interests, in partnership with government and law enforcement agencies, and other rights organisations. www.a-cg.org

The Real Deal national charter is designed to keep traders in counterfeit goods out of UK markets. It was launched at the Trading Standards Institute annual Conference in June 2009. Initiated by the Industry Trust for Intellectual Property Awareness, the Real Deal campaign is supported by all the key organisations with an interest in this issue in England and Wales. www.realdealmarkets.co.uk