



The European Consumers' Organisation

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE
PRESS RELEASE

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EU progresses in fighting counterfeit medicines

The counterfeiting of medicines is a criminal activity that gambles with consumers' health and a sad phenomenon on the rise (11.4 million counterfeit medicines were seized at EU borders in 2009¹ - an increase of 422% on 2006). In best case scenarios, counterfeit medicines can be inefficient and a waste of money for consumers, in worst case, lethal.

In such a context, BEUC welcomes the Directive to prevent the entry of counterfeit medicines to the EU as the European Parliament votes (February 16) to validate a text agreed with the Council of Ministers.

New legislation will improve consumer protection against counterfeit medicines

The text foresees an obligation to carry out awareness raising campaigns for consumers and should reinforce the safety of the entire supply chain of medicines.

Consumers' awareness online is key to success

"It is crucial consumers are warned of the risk they are exposed to when buying medicines online from illegal sources and are given the tools to instantly know if a website is legal or not" commented Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC.

Indeed, the major sources of counterfeit medicines are sales online, thus particularly exposing consumers looking for cheaper and stigmatised treatments (e.g. for sexual performance): over 50% of medicines purchased on internet websites of illegal pharmacies are counterfeit². When BEUC members tested sales of medicines on the internet they were able to order prescription-only medicines without a prescription, received pills incorrectly dosed, did not receive the accompanying patient leaflet or even received pills wrapped in newspaper sheets.

Data privacy to be carefully monitored

BEUC adds the caution that with the new safety features, the implementation of data privacy rules will have to be strictly monitored as sensitive health information will be stored and could be shared.

Remaining challenge: cost-effectiveness

Goyens added: "Sadly, legislation alone cannot totally solve the problem of counterfeiting. Now the remaining challenge will be to set up a cost-efficient system that will effectively enhance consumer safety when buying medicines, without leading to an increase in medicines prices."

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¹ Report on EU Customs Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights – Results at the EU border 2009
http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/resources/documents/customs/customs_controls/counterfeit_piracy/statistics/statistics_2009.pdf

² WHO factsheet 275, May 2010

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