

Is there rat poop in your beauty products?

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That bargain lipstick or fragrance you scored may be hiding a very dirty secret.

BBC News recently reported that counterfeit beauty products are not only proliferating the Internet, but get ready for this—lab tests done by the City of London Police showed that some of these imposters contained chemicals like arsenic, mercury, cyanide, and

even *urine and rat droppings*. Just let that sink in for a moment.

Cosmetic chemist Ginger King says the seemingly outrageous findings don't surprise her. "Rat droppings are a matter of hygiene, and the place of manufacturing is probably in some filthy basement," she says. What's more, cheap makers of faux cosmetics also won't test for heavy metal content—an issue in makeup, where traces of metals are sometimes used to create color—and that's likely why toxic chemicals were rampant in the findings, adds King.

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There are a variety of tricks that counterfeit product-makers pull to rip off the buyer. “Watered down versions of original products are the most commonly seen one,” says King. Counterfeits also frequently misspell the name on the packaging. For example, Chanel “No. 6” may be packaged exactly like Chanel No.5, and you have to look very closely to see that the number isn’t correct. Others get around it with wording by promising a quality or scent as the same as the original product, but at a cheaper price. They usually phrase it, “If you like x, you will like our y.” If the product isn’t authentic, King says you should be able to tell during the first use, based on an odor or texture that is off.

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When we contacted eBay, a popular destination to buy beauty products at discounted prices, a spokesperson said, “We continually introduce new proactive measures to combat counterfeits, and our sophisticated detection tools, enforcement, and strong relationships with brand owners, retailers and law enforcement agencies meant less than 0.025 percent of all listings hosted by eBay in 2014 were flagged as possible counterfeit products.”



However, experts say the only sure way to know for sure that you’re getting the real deal is to purchase directly from brands or from legitimate major retailers like Sephora, Beauty.com, and LovelySkin.com. “If the cost is way too cheap and significantly lower than what the market price is, that’s a red flag,” says King.

And you’re not just losing money on counterfeit products—you could be risking your health, warns New York dermatologist, Gary Goldenberg, M.D. “Not only will counterfeit skin products not work, they could potentially cause an allergic reaction or infection,” he says. If you react adversely to a formula, immediately stop use, and apply hydrocortisone cream to help quell any swelling or itching. If the symptoms persist, see your dermatologist ASAP.

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If you suspect something you purchased is counterfeit, King says to report the place you purchased it from to the Better Business Bureau. When buyers band together, the market becomes safer for everyone.