

How to Identify a Counterfeit and Genuine UL Mark on Electrical Products

Buyer beware: how to discern real versus fake UL Marks when shopping for electrical goods.



For over 100 years, Underwriters Laboratories' ever-recognizable UL Mark has been a beacon of safety and peace of mind, guiding consumers to reputable electrical products that have been rigorously tested and approved for safe use. To this day, the mere presence – or lack of – the trusted UL Mark is enough to make or break the purchases of millions of consumers worldwide.

Like money, art, clothing, and just about anything else of value, the UL Mark has been targeted by counterfeiters. Products of questionable manufacture, which haven't undergone quality evaluations or safety testing, are regularly sent to market bearing false UL symbols, and can threaten the people who purchase them with risks of fire, shock, and electrocution.

Although the ratio of counterfeit to legitimate UL Marks is extremely small, consumers can protect themselves by following these UL Mark guidelines when shopping for electrical products:

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How to Recognize a Genuine UL Mark

Whether a UL Mark comes in the form of a label or is die-stamped, silk-screened or molded into a product, it needs to contain the following 4 design elements to be verified as legitimate:

--The UL trademark: the letters "UL" arranged diagonally (descending left to right) within a circle, with a small ® symbol directly below the U

--The word "listed" printed either below or beside the circle in all capital letters:
LISTED

--A 4-character alphanumeric control number, or a 4 to 6-digit issue number. In the case of the issue number, it may or may not be preceded by the phrase "Issue No." as well as 1 or 2 letters

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--A product identity phrase that concisely names what the product is

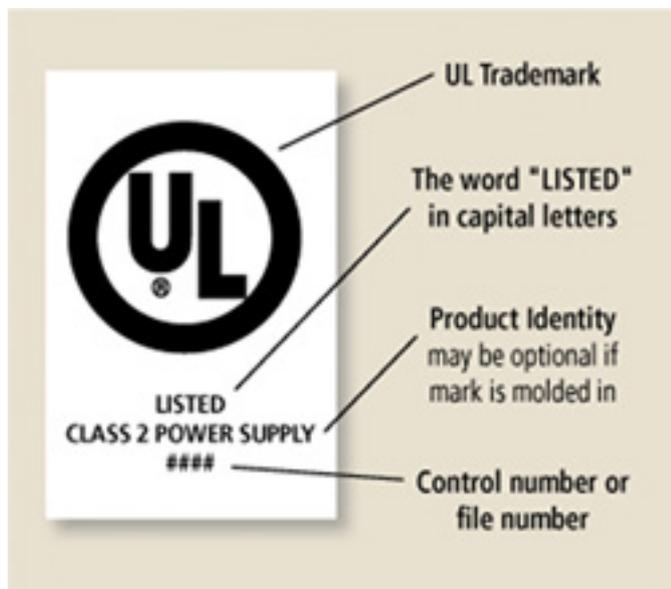
Additional signs of a genuine UL Mark are:

--A UL file number (which will often have the letter "E" as a prefix)

--The manufacturer's company name or logo

--Applicable electrical ratings

--Information designating the product's Catalog, Model, or Type designation



Indication that a UL Mark is Counterfeit

When shopping, steer clear of products whose UL Marks are missing the four main elements outlined above. In addition, keep an eye out for the following red flags, which can also be telling signs of a bogus UL Mark:

--Products whose packaging makes reference to UL, but is free from a company name, trademark, trade name, or other UL-authorized designations

--Low-quality, cheaply manufactured products with the letters "UL" printed side by side, instead of diagonally and inside a circle

--The use of words like approved or pending in place of classified or listed. Neither “approved” nor “pending” are sanctioned or used by Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.

--“UL marked” product packages containing a large number of spelling and grammatical errors

--The lack of appropriate product documentation, including instructions for use, safety warnings, and information on proper care and maintenance

--Products whose packaging lacks a toll-free customer service number, company address, or other corporate contact information

Buyer Beware

There are a few retail environments and instances in which you’re more likely to come across counterfeit UL marks. Exercise extra caution when:

--Shopping at deep-discount stores. If you come across a product that looks okay but is missing crucial information like a product name, brand, or certification marks, don’t stop and think about it – walk away

--You’re tempted to buy electrical products from flea markets, street vendors, or other “temporary” sources that don’t accept product returns, and whose credibility can’t be confirmed. Instead, stick with reputable retail establishments who allow returns and have a history of customer satisfaction

--A product’s price seems too good to be true. If an electrical product is being sold for significantly less than seemingly comparable items, there’s usually a reason – and that reason is often cheap materials and sub-par manufacturing.

Spend a few extra dollars and be on the safe side

How is UL battling counterfeits?

In addition to training US government agencies like the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), Underwriters Laboratories has worked to battle counterfeit UL Marks by educating consumers and retailers on counterfeit products, providing law enforcement with real time support, and publishing detailed anti-counterfeit reference materials.

However, from the consumer standpoint, UL's most noticeable preventive measure is undoubtedly their recently developed Holographic Mark, which will be put into full effect on newly manufactured products as of July 1, 2009. Intended for use on the products most likely to be counterfeited, the new holographic UL Mark features:

--A gold background that is quickly and easily identifiable to consumers, retailers, distributors, law enforcement, and Customs officials

--Color-shifting ink

--Micro-printing, wavy lines, and a pattern of floating UL symbols (one of which is surrounded by a burst detail)

To learn more about UL Marks and to view examples, visit http://www.ul.com/marks_labels/mark/index.html [1].

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