

## Bogus tourniquets could endanger lives in combat

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Counterfeit models of the U.S. Army's Combat Application Tourniquet are available on the Internet and on the open market.

Using the counterfeits can be lethal and the Army considered this enough of a problem to send out a priority message April 14 sounding the alert on these bogus devices.

"While I haven't seen any of these counterfeits in use, I have seen a few ordered by logisticians more interested in cutting costs than in quality control," said Col. John Kragh, U.S. Army Institute of Surgical Research at Fort Sam Houston.

"The Combat Application Tourniquet is standard issue to all deploying Soldiers. It's in each Soldier's Individual First Aid Kit pouch."

Kraugh explained the Army's concern with the counterfeits.

"The rod on the dummy tourniquet is bendable to a point where it cannot work right. It's like bending Gumby's arm," he said. "The makers do not market the item ostensibly as a medical device, but they sell it and package it like a retail item.

"The danger is if someone mistakes the fake for a real CAT or a real medical device," the colonel said. "That mistake could be fatal, since it cannot control bleeding."

A tourniquet is used to cut off the flow of blood to a part of the body, most often an arm or leg. It may be a special surgical instrument, a rubber tube, a strip of cloth, or any flexible material that can be tightened to exert pressure.

In a case of bleeding emergency, a tourniquet is used to completely stop the flow of blood.

Meant as a temporary fix, tourniquets are not recommended to be used for more than 20 minutes at a time because of the danger of congestion and gangrene.

The message said that the Defense Logistics Agency knows the fake items are available for purchase through non-Department of Defense websites, and that authorized DoD procurement gateways will supply only the approved commercial part from authorized distributors.

If the counterfeits are found in any inventory, they should be replaced by the real thing and the counterfeit should be reported to that activity's logistical supply office.

"It's easy to get the right items using routine, professional supply channels," Kragh said. "If other channels are used, then it's easy to get the wrong stuff. It just takes a credit card and choosing the wrong online supplier."

The message said the phony tourniquet was first encountered several years ago in a depot in Afghanistan and was thought to have been purged from the system. At that time, the item was of

obviously inferior construction and recognizable as a counterfeit. Today, the product has been modified and is difficult to distinguish from the authentic CAT.

The Element Cat (E-CAT) is a very carefully made counterfeit CAT tourniquet, manufactured in Hong Kong for \$8.50 each. It was designed to look, feel and act like the real thing.

The authentic item has a National Stock Number of 6515-01-521-7976 and has a unit cost of \$27.28.

“The markings appear to be a copyright or trademark infringement, and that is why law enforcement has become involved in the investigation,” the colonel noted. “We have had a previous counterfeit CAT confirmed from the Middle East, but this was purged from the warehouses uneventfully a couple of years ago. This is one of the reasons why we should remain vigilant.

As to why anyone would purchase the fake one while the authentic item is available through Army supply channels, the colonel had a possible explanation.

“The ordering system is decentralized giving initiative to low-level supply persons who can order what they think is best. An unknowing person could easily think that they are ordering a Combat Application Tourniquet online for a good price, but getting one cheap from China is too good to be true,” Kragh said.

Information about the proper combat application tourniquet can be seen on the U.S. Army Medical Materiel Agency website (<http://www.usamma.army.mil/assets/docs/CAT.pdf>) under the category “Hot Topics.”

An information line at (301) 619-3548 is also available.