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NEWS

## Beware the 'bargain' chargers that could kill you

*Matt Stevens finds dangerous products rife on Amazon and eBay*

**A** Which? investigation has discovered dozens of dangerous USB chargers, travel adaptors and power banks widely available on leading online marketplaces – including Amazon Marketplace and eBay.

All the dangerous devices are from unknown brands – ones our experts hadn't heard of.

We tested 35 devices from unknown brands – three quarters failed our electrical safety checks, which could result in electric shocks, fire or potential damage to devices.

Of these, it's arguably lookalike chargers that are most dangerous, as they're often almost impossible to distinguish from the real thing.

We tested 11 USB chargers that we bought from AliExpress, Amazon Marketplace, eBay and Wish, which appeared to be very similar to a

genuine Apple charger and claimed to work with Apple devices. They were all either unbranded or came from unknown brands. They were offered at temptingly low prices and appeared very positively reviewed.

Eight of the 11 lookalikes failed standard safety tests. We took them to pieces and found that the permitted distances between parts were too small. This could lead to them giving you an electric shock.

Seven also failed standard electrical strength checks, which could lead to them being overloaded and risk electric shock, the charger heating or even exploding.

In contrast, the official Apple USB charger passed all our tests, as did alternative chargers from brands such as Anker, Griffin and Juice Power.

### Travel safety

11 of 12 USB travel adaptors from unknown brands failed our electrical safety checks. Nine failed probe tests designed to check if it's possible to get an electric shock after pushing a finger or another object in the holes.

### Power banks

Six of 11 'unknown brand' power banks failed our tests. Five had no thermal protection to monitor the unit's temperature. One stopped working after our short-circuit test, another was damaged by our overcharge test. Any of these problems could lead to the product potentially catching fire.

Our test results are so worrying that we've sent them to the Office for Product Safety and Standards, and we're calling for it to work with Trading Standards to ensure ➡

➔ online marketplaces take their responsibilities seriously, and don't become an unpoliced wild west.

### Marketplaces respond

Each of the marketplaces said safety was their top priority and that merchants must follow selling guidelines or risk having their accounts suspended or removed.

All the products we reported have now been removed from sale.

But the sites are rife with similar 'cheap and cheerful' alternatives to the official branded product that could have similar issues.

### Take action

Based on what we've found, we think you should be wary of any products that fit the description of the problem devices we discovered. If you think you've bought a similar product, stop using it immediately and, if you can, return it for a refund.

If it has developed a fault, read our guide on what to do at [which.co.uk/faultyproducts](http://which.co.uk/faultyproducts). If you're outside the standard returns period or your item hasn't developed a fault but you're still concerned, it may still be possible to claim a refund under the Consumer Rights Act 2015.

Watch our video at [which.co.uk/fake](http://which.co.uk/fake) to see how difficult it can be to tell the lookalike product from the real thing.

## THE SITES ARE RIFE WITH SIMILAR ALTERNATIVES TO THE OFFICIAL BRANDED PRODUCT, WHICH COULD HAVE SIMILAR ISSUES



### 'BARGAINS' FROM OBSCURE BRANDS

PAUL LESTER, WHICH? TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

*Bargain price tags can hide a much higher price you have to pay*

**O**ur research into power adaptors is the most recent in a series in which we highlight issues with unknown brands – those unfamiliar to our research team or that couldn't be tracked down.

With such products, there's often a far higher price to pay than is shown on that 'bargain' price tag; risks to your personal data, your privacy, even your life. In this issue, we highlight

the real cost of cheap security cameras – all bought from Amazon marketplace and from brands originating from China we hadn't heard of.

We found critical security flaws in every one, many of which could result in someone being able to easily hack the camera and get access to footage. See p49 for more.

Our previous work into fake reviews has also shown overwhelmingly that the most likely products to be affected by fake reviews are similarly 'unknown brands', often originating in China, that are looking to break into the UK market.

These sorts of products are all too common on major online retailers like Amazon, and can look very tempting.

They're usually always far cheaper than you'd expect to pay for a well-known brand, and are often accompanied by large numbers of very

positive reviews, making them seem, at a glance, extremely appealing.

And if things go wrong, it may be difficult or impossible to locate the seller to raise the issue. In our investigation into wireless cameras, not even the contact we worked with, who is based in China, was able to get in touch with the companies behind the cameras to find out more about the issues we discovered.

Of course, all brands were unknown at one time or another, and many legitimate firms take issue with others muddying the waters with dubious promotional tactics.

However, while cheap products hitting online marketplaces in their thousands can appear tempting, our research has shown that, especially when it comes to products that could affect your safety and security, it's not always worth cutting costs.