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Convictions for Counterfeit Sales in Scotland Drop Sharply Despite Rise in Complaints

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The number of Scots convicted for selling counterfeit goods has plunged over the past few years, despite growing consumer complaints about fake products being sold online.

Official data released by the Scottish Government shows a dramatic drop in convictions, with only four individuals found guilty in 2024 for selling counterfeit items. That figure is down from 50 successful prosecutions in 2020/21. In 2023/24, only two prosecutions took place, and three people were cleared. So far in 2024/25, two more individuals have been acquitted, with 19 further cases still ongoing.

The statistics came to light following a written parliamentary question submitted by Scottish Conservative MSP Pam Gosal, who has raised concerns over the declining conviction rate. The figures arrive at a time when the UK's counterfeit industry is estimated to be worth over £8 billion and is increasingly linked to organised crime, human trafficking, and terrorism.

The rise of online platforms such as eBay, Vinted, and Depop has made it easier for counterfeit sellers to reach consumers. While offering convenience and affordability, these secondhand and resale apps have also become hotspots for criminal activity.

Consumer group Which? found that in a recent survey of over 1,300 online shoppers, 32 per cent had been scammed, mainly by receiving counterfeit or incorrect items. Meanwhile, Citizens Advice reported a 30 per cent rise in complaints over the past year involving fake goods sold online.

Luxury fashion brands such as Stone Island, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Prada are among the most commonly copied. In response, some platforms have introduced authentication services, particularly for high-end or expensive items, but experts say the illegal trade remains widespread and difficult to monitor.

Pam Gosal attributed the fall in prosecutions to dwindling police resources: "Given the SNP's relentless slashing of police budgets, it's little wonder that fewer people are being charged for selling counterfeit goods. Our police force is continually expected to do more with less, but their ever-depleted resources mean they're unable to investigate all crimes, and it's the public who suffer."

However, the Scottish Government has defended its position, stating that the police budget for the current year has reached a record £1.64 billion, an increase of £90 million from the previous year. A government spokesperson said decisions regarding prosecutions lie with the independent Lord Advocate.

In response to the growing problem, the Scottish Anti-Illicit Trade Group (SAITG) was relaunched earlier this year. Backed by the UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO), the group includes law enforcement, government bodies, and industry representatives, all working to crack down on counterfeit activity and intellectual property crime.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), which oversees prosecutions in Scotland, noted that every case is considered on its own merits. A COPFS spokesperson said: “We take prosecutorial action based on the facts and circumstances of each case. Careful consideration will be given to any reports of alleged criminal conduct which are submitted by the police, or any specialist reporting agency, to the Procurator Fiscal. Criminal proceedings will be raised if the reports contain sufficient evidence of a crime and if it is appropriate and in the public interest to do so.”

Despite these assurances, the sharp fall in prosecutions raises serious concerns about enforcement and deterrence. As the counterfeit market expands and becomes more embedded in the digital economy, campaigners warn that without tougher action and properly resourced policing, fake goods will continue to flood the market unchecked.