

Position statement from Ken Konopa, President, Fluke Industrial

When working in an environment where one mistake can result in serious injury or loss of life, the last thing you need is a piece of equipment that is not what it appears to be. That is the most insidious thing about counterfeit products or “look-alikes” that continually find their way into the hands of our electricians. Its one thing to pay more for a piece of equipment than its actual value, but the serious side is what its use can mean to your well-being.

At Fluke, we have been working hard with our distribution partners and with contractors to push the message of safety through education on test equipment design and performance. Our test tools are designed, manufactured and tested to exceed the safety requirements stipulated by the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) in their 61010 standard, the international benchmark for meter quality which is referenced in NFPA 70E. Our familiar yellow on dark coloring and meter design communicate confidence and trust to electricians when they hook up to a 480 V, three-phase circuit. In fact, we have a registered trade dress for the distinctive color combination of our products. But that hasn't stopped imitators from building lower quality products, some of which look like Fluke products, and labeling them as IEC 61010 compliant, even when they are not. These meters are readily available in the market today. Electricians who buy them may mistakenly believe they have purchased a tool that meets safety requirements and is of high quality. If they're lucky, they never have the opportunity to test the design of the meter when it is hit with an 8 KV spike. Whenever we become aware of these substandard meters, we take actions to have them removed from the market.

We applaud the effort by the National Electrical Distributors Association and the National Electrical Contractors Association in confronting this issue. We are proud to be a part of this effort and firmly believe that it will have a positive impact on the safety and productivity of electricians.

To help distributors, contractors and electricians understand the dangers inherent in look-alike, low quality test tools, Fluke has created a comprehensive Electrical Measurement Safety Program. Over the past five years we have distributed more than 50,000 training videos in an effort to increase awareness of safe work practices and how to select tools that meet or exceed safety standards. In addition, we offer free curriculum to schools so that new electricians are trained to recognize design elements and labeling that help identify quality tools.

It is important to understand that standards bodies such as IEC are not responsible for enforcing their standards. This means that a meter designed to a standard may not have been actually tested and proven to meet that standard. It is not uncommon for meters under test to fail before achieving the performance their manufacturers claim for them. The best assurance for electricians and contractors is to select test instruments that have been tested and certified to perform up to specification by independent testing laboratories.

To provide an extra measure of confidence, select test tools labeled to show that they have been certified to meet the appropriate contemporary standards by two or more independent labs. This ensures that test instruments have passed the most rigorous tests and meet every applicable standard. Such independent testing labs include Underwriters Laboratories (UL) in the United States, Canadian Standards Association (CSA) in Canada and CE in Europe.

The electrical environment we work in today is much more dangerous than in the past. It is in the best interest of all of us to understand the risks associated with counterfeit and look-alike products, and to take the appropriate action when we find them in the market. For distributors, this means carrying only products that have been appropriately tested for standards compliance and are supplied by a trusted source. For contractors, it means supplying your workers with quality, NFPA 70E compliant test tools. Working together, we can create a safer work environment.