The Frontline Plus Scare

I recently had a “scare” when I discovered that the company I had trusted as a reputable US veterinary website turned out to be Canadian and the Frontline Plus product I had used on my cats was from Australia! I immediately wondered if my cats had been exposed to a “counterfeit” product that contained who knows what.

I contacted the company which sold me the product in the following email:

Last year I purchased Frontline Plus for cats from what I thought was a reputable US company. I realized today (one year after purchase) that (Company Name Omitted) is Canadian and the product sent to me was from Merial Australia Pty. Ltd Batch E40607BX Exp.: 05-2012

Is this a real Merial product and is it safe to use?
Why does it have an expiration date when Frontline does not expire?

I need to reorder but don't want to use a counterfeit product not approved by EPA.

Jami
This is the response I received:

Dear Jami,

We only sell genuine Frontline products made by Merial and source out the best deals to pass the savings on to you. There is no “Made in the USA” Frontline, Merial manufactures it in France then distributes throughout their world markets where they charge considerably more if their customers are in the US. Any dating is stamped on for stock rotation purposes as the Frontline does not go bad.

The primary ingredient in all Frontline products is Fipronil which kills fleas and ticks. The Frontline we sell is exactly as described on the manufacturer’s own web site Merial.com:


(This is a link to the Australian website which is not the same as US.)

Thank You,
(Company Name Omitted)

Further research revealed that the product sold to me was “real” Frontline Plus that was produced by the Merial Corporation for Australia. This product is “legal” in Australia but it is not legal to sell in the US since it has not been approved by the EPA. Many online stores “pose” as US websites that are operated by a reputable veterinarian but they are actually businesses that operate outside the US. They are not subject to US laws and some will legally sell you products from other countries that are illegal to sell in the US.

In a phone call with a Merial Corporation veterinary technician the Merial Corporation confirmed that all Frontline Plus is manufactured in France, and the main ingredient to kill fleas is Fipronil. They would not confirm that all authentic Frontline Plus contains the same quantities of the Fipronil (or of other ingredients) and they stated that various countries have different application instructions according to that particular country’s guidelines for use of the product. For this reason, application instructions printed on the package carton may vary from country to country.

While there is no such thing as “counterfeit Frontline Plus” the Merial Corporation confirmed that some companies have counterfeited the formulae and packaging and have sold this under the Merial name. The Merial Corporation further stated that they only sell Frontline Plus to licensed veterinarians and that consumers should only purchase the product from their veterinarian.

There seems to be some licensed veterinarians that are selling authentic Frontline Plus on their websites but I can only say “buyer beware”. There is no way to examine the product before you purchase it and you have no guarantee that the seller will give you a refund if the product should be counterfeit or if it is produced for countries outside the US.

I recently (September 2010) purchased authentic Frontline Plus (12 Pack) for $123.99 from VetDepot.com. The order was placed on September 23rd and it arrived at my mailbox September 25th! I checked everything and this is the real EPA approved version.
VetDepot.com  
848 N. Rainbow Blvd., Ste. 2228  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89107  
866-456-0400

The cost per application is $10.33 while my local veterinarian charges $15.78. The Australian version that I purchased unknowingly from a Canadian company one year ago currently sells for $7.42 per application. The site that I used one year ago appeared to be a US company that was run by a licensed veterinarian. As a general rule, the cheaper the product is, the greater chance that it is either produced for countries outside the USA or that it is counterfeit. I have three cats and all pet owners know that ANY savings on pet products is always helpful.

While *Fipronil* is the main ingredient, no one, including the *Merial* Corporation, seems to be willing to confirm that the ingredients of *Frontline Plus* are the same in every country or that these ingredients are the same quantities worldwide for individual doses. I don't believe there would be much difference between an Australian cat and one in the US. *Frontline Plus* is sold in both countries and I have just unknowingly applied the Australian version to my US cats over the past year without harm. What bothers me is that the *Merial* Corporation does not provide a "fact sheet" that lists the various countries and the differing ingredients of the product that is sold world wide. If Australian *Frontline Plus* is safe for Australian kitties then why not provide a list of the ingredients? If there is slight variations then what difference would it make? The *Merial* Corporation is very cautious about disclosing any information about non-EPA approved *Frontline Plus*. A "fact sheet" would also help consumers who are sold "illegal" products to recognize them and take appropriate action. Instead of a "fact sheet" the *Merial* Corporation states that they cannot discuss anything about the ingredients because different countries have different regulations and application instructions. This attitude makes me wonder if I have exposed my cats to something harmful, but then again what is the difference between an Australian and a US kitty? If the product is safe for Aussie cats then it must be OK for my American kitties...

I also contacted the *Merial* Corporation via email and provided a link to the site where this article was originally published ([http://www.thoughtandbelief.com/frontline-plus-scare.html](http://www.thoughtandbelief.com/frontline-plus-scare.html)). I asked them if they would like to make a "statement" or provide "contact information" that would be included on this page "exactly as it was sent to me" with no additions or deletions but I have not received a response (as of September 2010).
Since I can't get the "facts" from the Merial Corporation I can only speculate. The product that I applied to my three cats was genuine Frontline Plus that was not approved by the EPA but was approved for use in Australia. Was it the same product that I paid considerably more for in the US? That's the question Merial refuses to answer. As I already stated an Australian cat is no different than a US one. A cat is a cat and if a product is safe for one-then it must be safe for all cats around the world. We of course have no way of knowing what is in a "counterfeit" product but the question remains, "Is genuine Frontline Plus that is produced in France for the Merial Corporation the same world wide?"

Why is Merial reluctant to either confirm that the product is the same or that it is different? When I think of this question I can only imagine two possible reasons. Either kitties outside the US are at great risk from use of this product or someone's bank account is filling up with US dollars!

I hope my experience can help other concerned pet owners.

Additional information is available from our website:

http://www.thoughtandbelief.com/frontline-plus-scare.html

In my search for the facts I came across some useful articles and information that I have included below.
HOW TO SPOT COUNTERFEIT FRONTLINE FLEA MEDICATION

by: auctionwonderland
http://myworld.ebay.com/auctionwonderland/

We all love our pets and want to make sure they are safe and flea free. Fleas can cause serious illnesses to our beloved pets and products like FRONTLINE PLUS help to keep them flea free and healthy.

A single application costs around $13 - $15. That is quite some money and that’s where counterfeit products come into play. Most fake FRONTLINE PLUS (and other flea medication) products are being sold by sellers originating in TAIWAN, HONG KONG, SINGAPORE, AUSTRALIA AND EVEN CANADA.

Those fake FRONTLINE PLUS PRODUCTS are ILLEGAL and NOT EPA REGISTERED and MAY CONTAIN TOXINS that can be DANGEROUS to your families and pets health!

Some sellers are offering FRONTLINE products that have been made for use in other countries and even so they may be legal and approved in those countries they can NOT be sold in the U.S. and are NOT approved for the American market! Those products may not be counterfeits, but they are ILLEGAL! ONLY EPA approved FRONTLINE products can be sold in the U.S.!

No matter what the seller will tell you - MERIAL does NOT confirm that oversea market and American market FRONTLINE products are identical!

If the FRONTLINE in question does not have the EPA approval - DON’T BUY IT!
Stay away from FRONTLINE that will not come in the original box and packing!

GENUINE (EPA APPROVED) FRONTLINE PLUS
- NEVER HAS AN EXPIRATION DATE !!!!!!!!!!!
- DOES NOT HAVE ORANGE (OR ANY OTHER COLOR) STRIPES ON THE BACK OF THE PACKING
- HAS AN EPA # ON THE BACK OF THE BOX
- SINGLE DOSE APPLICATOR PACKING AND BOX HAVE A MATCHING LOT #
- THE SINGLE DOSE APPLICATOR PACKING HAS A SMALL OVAL SHAPED CUT ON THE TOP TO OPEN IT
- HAS NOTCHES BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL APPLICATOR PACKAGES
- THE LIQUID AMOUNT ON THE SINGLE DOSE PACKING IS SHOWN IN FL. OZ ONLY !! (IT’S SHOWN IN ml ON THE BOX ONLY!)
- TEXT ON SINGLE DOSE APPLICATOR IS READABLE FROM THE " NECK " TO THE BOTTOM!
- BOX READS WATER PROOF (NOT WATER FAST OR ANYTHING LIKE IT)
- HAS THE " KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN - CAUTION " PRINTED ON THE LOWER LEFT CORNER OF THE BOX
- HAS A LOT # ON THE SINGLE DOSE PACKING
- FRONTLINE (TOP SPOT) FOR DOGS SHOWS DOGS WEIGHT ON BOX AND APPLICATOR

I hope this guide helps you to spot counterfeit and illegal FRONTLINE PLUS products before you purchase them and to keep you and your family safe and your pets flea free!

REAL FRONTLINE PLUS:
(note that the writing on the package is in English ONLY)

The following are REAL EPA registration numbers for FRONTLINE products:

- Frontline Top Spot for Cats (EPA Reg. No. 65331-2)
- Frontline Top Spot for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 65331-3)
- Frontline Plus for Cats (EPA Reg. No. 65331-4)
- Frontline Plus for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 65331-5)

EPA # ON BACK OF RETAIL BOX:

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LOT # ON THE SIDE OF THE RETAIL BOX MATCHES
LOT # ON APPLICATOR PACKING:

LOT # ON APPLICATOR PACKING MATCHES LOT # ON SIDE OF BOX:
(picture below shows applicator packing from a different box as an example)

REAL - Frontline applicator packing has Lot # and dogs weight --->
Frontline FOR CATS does NOT show weight
Packing corners are "cut"

COUNTERFEIT

There are NO STRIPES on the back of applicator packing --->
COUNTERFEIT

Real packing is NOT square, no oval shaped cut to open --->

COUNTERFEIT

Text on applicator is readable from BOTTOM TO NECK --->
Also notice the liquid amount on packing is shown in ml !

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This is a good example of how a FAKE FRONTLINE PLUS BOX will look:
Caution warning out of place - should be in left lower corner - Reads Water Fast - Has no flip top - Reads Pipettes, should be applicators!

I am not selling FRONTLINE products and there is no reason for me to give you the information provided in this guide other than the fact that I do not want to see you, your family or pet get hurt by buying a product that can cause harm to them and the fact that I disapprove of sellers that simply don’t care about you, your family or pet and are only out to make a profit - no matter what!

Please be careful and safe!

If you still have unanswered questions, contact MERAL directly:

USA -
Merial Limited
3239 Satellite Boulevard
Building 500
30096 Duluth, Georgia
Phone: 678-638-3000

Canada -
Merial Canada Inc.
20000 Clark Graham, Baie d’Urfe
Quebec H9X 4B6
Phone: 514-457-1555
Counterfeit Pesticide Products for Dogs and Cats

Resources

- Questions On Pesticides?
  National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC)  1-800-858-7378
- http://npic.orst.edu/

Information for Consumers

1. What action is EPA announcing?

EPA, in cooperation with its state and regional regulatory partners, is announcing the issuance of stop sale, use, and removal orders to retailers and other distributors of certain counterfeit pesticide products for control of fleas and ticks on dogs and cats. The stop sale, use, and removal orders are intended to disrupt an effort to distribute counterfeit pet pesticides. The counterfeit pesticides appear to have been unlawfully imported and were packaged in cartons designed to look like legitimately registered pesticides available in the U.S. under the trade names "Advantage" and "Frontline." The orders prohibit retailers and other distributors from distributing or selling the counterfeit pesticide products and require their proper disposal.
2. Why is EPA taking this action?

EPA is responsible for assuring that all pesticides sold in the United States do not cause adverse effects under EPA-approved label use conditions. The counterfeiters have placed foreign labeled applicator package inserts in counterfeit Advantage and Frontline retail cartons printed to resemble the U.S.-registered products. Frontline products, among other things, may be missing instruction leaflets bearing directions for use required under U.S. law. Further, the Frontline applicators may not be in the required child-resistant packaging. In addition to the inadequate labeling and packaging, consumers cannot be assured that the counterfeiters inserted the appropriate size applicator for the animal pictured or otherwise indicated on the retail carton of either the Advantage or Frontline products. So, use of the counterfeit products may put the treated pet at risk.

3. Are all of the Frontline and Advantage brands of pesticides counterfeit?

Consumers should be aware that the Frontline and Advantage brands of pesticides are registered by EPA. The manufacturers of these two product lines are not implicated in the enforcement actions EPA is announcing. However, product inventory that may be available at the retail level at this time could include both counterfeit and legitimately registered and marketed pesticides. Therefore, EPA is advising you about this problem and recommending that you determine whether the product you are considering or have purchased appears to be a counterfeit of the EPA-registered pesticides.

4. What products are affected by this action?

The following are brand names and EPA registration numbers of legitimate products. The counterfeit products may use these same names and numbers.

- Frontline Top Spot for Cats (EPA Reg. No. 65331-2)
- Frontline Top Spot for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 65331-3)
- Frontline Plus for Cats (EPA Reg. No. 65331-4)
- Frontline Plus for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 65331-5)
- Advantage 10 for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 11556-117)
- Advantage 20 for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 11556-119)
- Advantage 55 for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 11556-120)
- Advantage 100 for Dogs (EPA Reg. No. 11556-122)
- Advantage 9 for Cats (EPA Reg. No. 11556-116)
- Advantage 18 for Cats (EPA Reg. No. 11556-118)

5. How can I determine if I have purchased the legitimate products?

The pesticide products are sold in a carton. It is difficult to distinguish counterfeit products from EPA-registered products because they look very much alike. To determine if the product you have purchased is legitimate, check to see if it meets the following criteria. If the product fails any one of these criteria, it most likely is an illegitimate product and should be disposed of properly.

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Frontline products

1. The lot number on the retail carton matches the lot number on the applicator package and/or the individual applicators.
2. The instruction leaflet is included. It provides the following information: first-aid statements, including emergency U.S. telephone numbers; precautionary statements for humans and pets; directions for use; and storage and disposal statements.
3. The pesticide is contained in an applicator package, which is child-resistant. The directions for opening the child-resistant applicator package include an illustration that actually looks like the applicator package. The directions include "To remove applicator, use scissors or lift and remove plastic tab to expose foil, then pull down."
4. The legitimate applicator package looks like this; note the notch between the individual applicator packages, which generally are absent on counterfeit products. Text on the package is in English only.
5. Frontline Applicator Packages

Frontline Applicator Package (Front)  Frontline Applicator Package (Back)

6. Once you open the applicator package, each individual applicator has a label that includes the registrant's name "Merial;" the product name; the EPA registration number (see list above); the net contents in fluid ounces (fl. oz.) (not in metric measure, i.e., ml); percentage (%) of active ingredient(s) (fipronil for Frontline Top Spot products; and fipronil and (S)-methoprene for Frontline Plus products); and the statements "CAUTION," "Keep out of reach of children," and "See full label for additional directions." Text is in English only.
7. The applicator label for the dog products includes the size of the dog in pounds on which the product is to be used.
Advantage products

8. The only way to determine a legitimate Advantage product from a counterfeit product is by examining the actual applicator tubes that are inside the carton. Since the directions for use on the retail carton (outer box) and instruction leaflet of the legitimate product and the counterfeit product are identical, check the language that is printed on the applicator tubes. The legitimate Advantage products all contain applicator tubes that are printed in English. The most obvious sign of a counterfeit product is that the applicator tubes are printed in a foreign language (most likely French or German).

9. The legitimate applicator tubes include the EPA Registration Number, the signal word WARNING, and the child hazard warning (Keep Out of Reach of Children). Counterfeit applicator tubes may lack this information.

10. Legitimate applicator tubes will also include a reference statement that refers users to the main labeling for directions for use and will include the manufacturing company’s name (Bayer). Counterfeit applicator tubes may lack this information.

11. Legitimate applicator tubes will contain an active ingredient statement that agrees with the active ingredient statement on the retail carton (9.1% imidacloprid). A counterfeit product may have an active ingredient statement that differs (such as 10%).

12. Is there a penalty for purchasing the counterfeit products?

For individual consumers, there is no penalty for purchasing a counterfeit product. Penalties only apply to persons who distribute or sell counterfeit products. However, purchasing a counterfeit pesticide may place you and your family at risk. For example, first-aid treatment directions may not be immediately available in case of an emergency. Further, a child may be harmed if he or she is able to open a package that is not child-resistant. Thus, EPA is recommending that consumers dispose of product that has been discovered to be counterfeit.

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I discovered that a dog product was contained in a package intended for use on cats. Will my cat be harmed if I apply the product to it?

If you discover inconsistencies like this, do not use it. EPA encourages consumers to dispose of counterfeit pesticides they may have inadvertently purchased.

How should I dispose of a counterfeit product?

If you discover that you have one of the counterfeit products, you should contact your local solid waste agency* for information on proper disposal in your community. Your local government may recommend that you take the product to a household hazardous waste collection program. If allowed by your local government, you may put the counterfeit product in your trash. You may also contact an organization named Earth 911 at 1-800-CLEANUP or [http://www.earth911.org/] to obtain community disposal information.

To identify your local solid waste agency, look in the government section of your phone book under categories such as solid waste, public works, or garbage, trash or refuse collection.

Who should I contact if I discover the counterfeit products in a store?

You should notify the store staff. You may also alert EPA to counterfeit products by visiting the Agency's Web site at [www.epa.gov/compliance/complaints/index.html](http://www.epa.gov/compliance/complaints/index.html) for enforcement matters or by contacting the Agency's regional office serving your state. See [http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/local/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/local/index.htm) to determine which office serves your state.

Who can I contact if I suspect that my pet has been harmed by one of these counterfeit products?

First, contact your veterinarian for medical assistance and advice. In addition, the National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) is an EPA-sanctioned toll-free helpline designed to assist in providing answers to most questions regarding pesticides and pesticide poisonings. You can reach NPIC at 1-800-858-7378, daily from 6:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. (PT). NPIC also has a Web site with comprehensive pesticide information at [http://npic.orst.edu/](http://npic.orst.edu/).
**Will EPA’s action mean that these counterfeit products will no longer be available?**

EPA is continuing to pursue this issue. Unfortunately, it is likely that counterfeit and other illegal products may still be available. You should be careful when purchasing products such as these to look for the indicators described above. In addition to the counterfeited products described above, other illegal versions of these products may be available, including the following:

- foreign labeled product with stickers containing some U.S. information
- foreign-labeled products.

These illegal products pose potential risks related to units of measure that are unfamiliar to U.S. consumers, lack of child-resistant packaging, lack of precautionary statements, and the potential for the pesticide itself to be other than what is indicated on the carton.

**For more information**

For more information and answers to your questions, go to [EPA’s Q&A database](https://www.epa.gov/pesticides) and select "Fleas and Ticks" in the drop-down topic menu.