

Probe Rounds Up Fake 'Alligators'

New York (AP) — People shopping for brand name clothes were warned yesterday that the next alligator they buy may be a fake.

In an afternoon operation, investigators from the city's Department of Consumer Affairs and Izod Lacoste, makers of the garments with the famous alligator symbol, searched five retail stores on the Lower East Side and netted over 80 shirts they said had phony Izod labels.

The store owners were issued violation notices by the department and had the questionable merchandise confiscated by Izod representatives. Officials said the owners will face charges filed by both parties in separate hearings next month.

The city could fine the owners up to \$500 for each counterfeit item found on their premises, said Warren Traiger, director of the department's legislation and research staff. At one store, officials seized 40 shirts they said had counterfeit labels.

Donald Kelley, an attorney for Izod, said the owners were issued court orders, obtained by Izod's parent company, General Mills, to appear at federal court in Manhattan concerning the possession and sale of counterfeit merchandise.

The operation was staged two hours after Izod investigators posing as shoppers inspected stores in the area and purchased counterfeit Izod garments, according to Traiger.

"This is ridiculous," said Azriel Lewin, president of Olympic Unisex, 158 Orchard St., as investigators and reporters swarmed through his store. Thirty-four shirts, believed to be counterfeit, were found behind the store's counter and display window. Several alligator emblems could be seen peeling off the garments.

"How was I supposed to know they were counterfeit?" Lewin asked.

Betty Welter, a quality control representative for Izod, said the fake garments, which she said are being circulated nationwide, possess copied alligator emblems ironed onto the material, not stitched on as with a true Izod

product. She added that some of the shirts and sweaters are not made of the same fabric or are poorly stitched together.

"A consumer could buy one of these shirts and it would fall apart in the first washing," she said.

Lewin said he bought about three dozen shirts last week from a man claiming to be an Izod salesman. Lewin said the cost of the shirts ranged between \$7.50 and \$10.75 each and that he has been selling them for \$15.99 to \$18.99.

He said the salesman, who said his name was Jerry, never showed any credentials but said he was from Izod, was dressed in a suit and drove a van.

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