

HM Revenue & Customs have recently been working closely with tobacco manufacturers to develop new anti-counterfeiting features to tackle the illegal trade in counterfeit cigarettes and hand rolling tobacco.

The new covert markings on cigarette packets and tobacco pouches are invisible to the naked eye but can be identified using a handheld reader to allow Customs Officers and Trading Standards Officers to quickly identify counterfeit tobacco products.

This new initiative allows officers to tackle the growing problem of counterfeit tobacco goods and the harm that their illicit sale brings to honest, law-abiding businesses.

Around 50 per cent of the cigarettes seized and tested are counterfeit and, with expertly crafted packing it is almost impossible to distinguish them from the genuine product.

Most people buying cheap cigarettes are unlikely to realise they are buying counterfeits, which provide a whole new set of risks to smokers. Tests on previous counterfeit hauls have revealed the cigarettes contained up to 60 per cent more tar, 80 per cent more nicotine, and 133 percent more carbon monoxide.

In addition research has shown counterfeit cigarettes can contain three times the levels of arsenic, five times the level of cadmium and nearly six times the level of lead found in genuine brands.

They have also been found to contain rat droppings, camel dung, sawdust and tobacco beetles.

Anyone who is suspicious that the cigarettes they have been offered are not the real thing is encouraged to phone the Customs Hotline on 0800 59 500