

# L.A. Anticounterfeit Sweep Brings 30 Arrests

by [LIZA CASABONA](#) and Khanh T.L. Tran  
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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said Tuesday that a coordinated crackdown in the greater Los Angeles area led to the arrest of 30 individuals and the seizure of millions of dollars of counterfeit goods.

ICE said it seized counterfeit apparel, jewelry, leather goods, DVDs, CDs and fake iPhones worth an estimated \$12 million if they had been genuine. Goods seized bore fake trademarks including Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Hermès, Cartier, Nike, Ray-Ban, Kate Spade, Oakley and Dooney & Bourke.

In all, ICE seized 47,000 individual items, the agency said. Authorities also seized equipment used to manufacture fake apparel.

The seizures were conducted by ICE's Office of Homeland Security Investigations in cooperation with local law enforcement, including the Los Angeles Police Department and the Riverside County District Attorney's office.

The LAPD had conducted three stings in the past two weeks. On Aug. 17, the LAPD, working in conjunction with ICE and Homeland Security, seized \$6 million worth of knockoff True Religion jeans in a container shipped from China.

Subsequent seizures were conducted in Santee Alley, a known haven for counterfeits in Los Angeles, on Aug. 24 and 26. The last seizure from a warehouse in Santee Alley netted fake goods worth almost \$9.8 million, according to ICE.

Lt. Patrick Shields in the LAPD's detective support and vice division said seizures of counterfeit goods have been progressively increasing over the past six years. Last year, his division issued 29 search warrants, made 46 arrests and seized \$15.1 million worth of counterfeit products. As of Aug. 26, the division reported 27 search warrants, 99 arrests and \$15.8 million worth of knockoffs.

While the weak economy is one major factor in the increase in counterfeiting, Shields said there's also a trend of criminals switching from narcotics to intellectual property crimes. "Even though it's a felony, the sentencing [for intellectual property crime] isn't as harsh as narcotics," he said.

The Los Angeles seizures were part of a larger effort by the ICE-led National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center, called "Operation Fire Sale." The operation resulted in the seizure of more than \$16 million worth of counterfeit merchandise in New York, Miami, Philadelphia, Las Vegas and Los Angeles last week, ICE said.