

COUNTERFEIT COIN DETECTION KIT

By: Susan Headly

In today's coin market we are all aware of the influx of counterfeit coins . This problem can be very costly to anyone with little or no knowledge of what or how to look for signs that a coin is a fake. With the advent of auction sites like eBay and OverStock.com it becomes necessary to know how to tell real from fake and a little knowledge can go a long way. In this article I hope to give you some basic knowledge and information to make a more informed choice in your coin purchases. This is by no means a complete list of what you need but it's a good start.

Anybody can detect counterfeit coins using five simple, inexpensive tools. The following explains what these tools are and how to use them to protect yourself against fake and counterfeit coins.

1. A Simple Magnet

You can use a simple magnet to rule out many Chinese-made counterfeit coins because about 70% of all fake coins from China are produced with iron based planchets or blanks. Since the 1943 steel cent is the only circulating US coin that should be attracted to a magnet any other US coin should be deemed a counterfeit. Make note that Canada has been using steel in their planchets for decades so this test has no meaning for Canadian coins.

Hold the magnet near the coin and see if they attract, even a little bit. If the magnet sticks to a US coin, it is virtually certain to be a counterfeit.

2. A Gram Scale Accurate to at Least One Tenth Gram

Many Chinese counterfeiters use scrap metal to make their own coin blanks. As a result, the coins are usually underweight. This is not the case all the time as I have examined some that were overweight also. They can be underweight from shrinkage from using cast dies or blanks. The U.S. Mint adheres to very narrow tolerances for error in weight and diameter, so any U.S. coin off by more than 1% is a suspected counterfeit.

Make sure your scale can weigh to the tenth of a gram (0.10) or better. Do not use diet scales as they are not accurate enough. Place the coin on the scale and then compare the weight to the known proper weight for that coin. More on that later in the article. If the coin is off by more than 1% it is more than likely counterfeit.

3. A Caliper Accurate to the Hundredth of an Inch

A caliper is used for measuring the diameter of a coin. The U.S.. Mint is extremely precise in making coins of the proper diameter, so any coin that is even too small or large by a small amount is highly suspect. Counterfeit coins are frequently underweight and undersized.

Slide the caliper jaws to the closed position and press the set button to calibrate to zero. Slowly slide the jaws open until they are touching the coin across from each other. Make sure the coin is snug but not too tight and read the results. Compare your measurement to

known US Mint standards for that particular coin. If it too small or large, it is a suspected fake.

4. A High Powered Magnifier or Loupe

A magnifier that has a minimum power rating of 8X (8 times magnification or “8 power”) will allow you to see details on the surface that are invisible to the naked eye. Ideally, you should use a 10X or greater triplet loupe, which has much more clarity but is also more expensive.

Holding the coin in one hand and the magnifier in the other, move the coin around to inspect it's surface. Look for signs of bubbles or pimples of the surface, or seams or file marks on the edge. Look for characteristics normal for that type of coin by comparing to a known genuine specimen. “Soapy” looking or bumpy surfaces can be a sign of a counterfeit.

5. A Reference of Standards for U.S. Coin Types

In order to determine if your weight and diameter measurements are within U.S. Mint tolerances, you will need to compare them to known U.S. Coin specifications. Most general purpose coin guides such as the Red Book have these specifications noted. Although the allowable amount of deviation from the Mint's specifications varies for each type of coin, all of the tolerances are very, very small. Any coin that is a gram off or a sixteenth of an inch off in size is way out of tolerance and most likely a fake.

After weighing and measuring your coin compare the findings to known specifications. If there is a 1% or more difference the coin is probably counterfeit. The advice is to stay away.

The best way to avoid a counterfeit coin is to arm yourself with knowledge. Read about and examine as many of your particular coin as possible. Better yet buy certified if it's over \$50.00. This can avoid problems down the line. Don't spend more than you can afford to loose on a raw coin.

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The magnet, scale and calipers can be reasonably purchased from places like Harbor Freight or online at eBay.