

# Technology makes counterfeit money easier to print

The next time you receive some cash, inspect it carefully. Fake bills are circulating in the U.S. economy and you don't want to be the one stuck holding funny money.

Even though the design of our currency has become more sophisticated, authorities report that criminals are able to use ever-improving technology to counterfeit bills that can fool most people.

## Counterfeiter Caught

In November, federal agents arrested a Georgia man who stands accused of printing more than \$1 million in phony \$50 bills. Heath J. Kellogg and five other men, who are believed to be his accomplices, allegedly sold the fake money for real currency, or used it to purchase expensive items that they would later return for cash.

The Treasury Department, which is responsible for printing the U.S. money supply, takes many precautions to make sure our currency is extremely hard to copy. For example, the \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 bills all include watermark portraits that can be seen in the paper when you hold it up to the light.

Authorities say Kellogg, a self-taught graphic artist, allegedly put paper through a printer to give it a yellowish tint. He then printed the front side of the money on one piece of paper. On a separate sheet, he printed the back of the bill, and then flipped it over and printed a watermark. He sprayed glue to stick the sheets of paper together. By doing this, he was able to simulate the watermark.

## Stopped By The Secret Service

The forgery was good, but not good enough to fool investigators from the U.S. Secret Service. The agency that is better known for providing bodyguards for the president and his family also has another important duty: protecting the nation's money from counterfeiters.

In fact, the Secret Service was established almost 150 years ago, after the Civil War, when counterfeiting was so common that almost one-third of the money in circulation was phony.

## Genuine Money Markers

To combat counterfeiting, the Treasury Department includes many complicated details in its currency. The bills that are produced today look very different from those made decades ago. For example, new bills have color-shifting ink, which turns from copper to green when you tilt the bill.

But technology is also benefiting the counterfeiters. High-quality scanners, printers and toner ink make it easier to copy money. The Internet also provides information and tips about counterfeiting.

That's how a man from Rhode Island, who was arrested in November, allegedly learned how to use a chemical soap to rub off the number five on \$5 bills and reprint them as \$100s.

The Secret Service told The New York Times it seized about \$81 million in counterfeit money last year and arrested almost 2,500 people. Not all of the fake bills are produced in the United States. Some of it comes from overseas, especially from Peru. The most commonly counterfeited denomination is the \$20 bill, followed by the \$100.

Counterfeiting money is a serious crime and those found guilty of doing it face a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Counterfeiting hurts innocent people because the government does not reimburse you if you receive a fake bill.

## Know Your Money

To avoid becoming a victim of counterfeiting, the Secret Service and the Treasury Department recommend that you familiarize yourself with the special features of our currency, such as the watermarks and color-shifting ink.

Other ways to spot a fake include examining the green serial numbers. They should be the same shade as the green Treasury seal and they should be evenly spaced. Counterfeit bills often have serial numbers that are irregularly spaced and not the same shade as the seal.

Look at the person pictured on the bill, such as Abraham Lincoln on the \$5, or Andrew Jackson on the \$20. Does the portrait appear lifelike? If so, it is genuine. On counterfeit bills, the portrait looks flat and lifeless.

Examine the bill closely for extra-fine red and blue fibers embedded in the paper. Kellogg allegedly tried to reproduce the fibers by tracing them with colored pens.

Sometimes you don't even have to look at a bill to know that it is phony. Feeling it will give you a clue. Fake bills often feel slippery and don't have the cloth-like texture of real money.

The Treasury Department has ordered the paper for its bills from the same mill in Massachusetts for more than a century. The company uses a secret manufacturing process and has the paper shipped by armored tractor-trailer trucks to the government's printing facilities. It is illegal to reproduce the paper, even if you don't print anything on it.

Think twice before you accept any \$500, \$1,000, \$5,000 or \$10,000 bills. The Treasury last printed them in 1945 and the ones that are still around today belong mainly to collectors.

## Looking Ahead

Nowadays, when people have to pay for something, they tend to pull a piece of plastic out of their wallets, instead of cash. But the Secret Service is still as busy as ever. The agency is also responsible for investigating credit card fraud and other types of electronic crimes involving money.

Staying one step ahead of the counterfeit artists will take a fresh generation of technology-savvy agents and investigators. The agency recommends that students who are interested in working for the Secret Service get a four-year college degree, be in good physical shape and have a record as a law-abiding citizen.