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Trading Standards officers have recently seen a rise in the number of illegally imported dogs in the local area in the last six months.

Since the start of the year they have had a threefold rise in calls from members of the public about this issue. This has led to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trading Standards team repeating a warning to city residents about the dangers of buying or adopting an imported dog.

In recent months, a number of dogs have been placed into quarantine that were imported by organisations claiming to be 'Rescue Charities or Rescue Groups'. Although the dogs were accompanied by official pet passports issued by a veterinary surgeon, the information contained within them appeared to be fraudulent resulting in the quarantine of the animal. There has been particular problems with dogs originating from Romania.

The Trading Standards team have received complaints and information that not all rescue dogs or street dogs are legitimate rescue animals. Sometimes they are simply ex-puppy farm breeding stock that is no longer required. Websites and donations pages can be set up by individuals claiming that the animals are being held in 'kill shelters' in order to pull on the UK public's heartstrings and generate income.

In addition to the rabies/disease risk, legislation requires that the illegally imported dogs are placed into quarantine at a cost to the current owner (circa £1,000) . If the quarantine costs cannot be met or raised via donations then there is a risk that the animal may be euthanized.

Individuals and organisations have been quick to identify a new market of selling imported puppies as a result of changes in legislation and that UK puppy prices are far higher than those in Eastern Europe. In many cases, dates of birth are falsified on the animal's passport – importers declare that the animal is older than its true age so allowing it to be vaccinated and imported into the UK with seemingly correct paperwork.

This practice clearly has hidden dangers - vaccinations received at an early age may be ineffective so allowing the potential spread of zoonotic diseases such as rabies.

Peter Gell Head of Regulatory Services at Peterborough City Council said: The practice of illegally importing animals not only increases the risk of spreading disease to the UK, but it also raises serious welfare concerns for the animals, and in many instances results in additional (quarantine) costs for the unsuspecting purchaser. Anyone thinking of buying or re-homing a dog should carefully consider the following basic steps:

- > Be suspicious if the seller can not show you the puppy with its mother and litter mates. View the puppy where it was bred.
- > Get as much information about where the puppy has come from and be especially aware if the seller is from outside the UK - check that the passport or information contained within it is not fraudulent.
- > If the dog has been vaccinated ask to see all the documentation. This must clearly state the veterinary practice where this was carried out. Be suspicious if the address of the veterinary practice is outside the UK.
- > If the seller informs you that the puppy has been brought in from another country it should have a pet passport and should be a minimum of 15 weeks of age.
- > Never agree to have the dog delivered to your home address or to meet the seller an undisclosed location to collect the animal.
- > Never agree to pay money in advance for an imported animal
- > Be wary of individuals/groups offering to import rescue animals to re-home
- > Be wary of social media requests that wish to generate funds for an urgent operation on an animal - it may be a scam

Instead, it is always good practice to source a rescue dog from a credible animal charity such as [Wood Green](https://www.woodgreen.org.uk/) (<https://www.woodgreen.org.uk/>).