

Ikea probes 'fake' store in China

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Furniture giant Ikea said Wednesday it would look into an alleged fake Ikea store in China -- which according to media reports is an exact copy of the Swedish chain's blue-and-yellow warehouses.

Ikea said it had reported the lookalike store to its worldwide franchiser, which was "dealing with this matter together with their legal counsel."

"Inter Ikea Systems ... the owner of the Ikea concept, sees it as very important to protect the intellectual property rights," the company said in a statement.

According to Swedish media, the 1,000-square-metre (10,700-square-foot) store is nearly identical to Ikea's outlets down to its cafeteria, which however served Chinese food instead of the Swedish staples traditionally served at Ikea.

A spokeswoman for the chain who had seen pictures of the fake store, located in in the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming, told AFP it was very similar to a "real" Ikea.

"I don't know about the furniture it sells but the concept in itself was very much alike," Camilla Meiby said.

Ikea already has nine stores in five Chinese cities, she said.

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"The best thing we can do to prevent such stores from opening up in the future is to open more stores and make the Ikea products available to more people," the company said in its statement.

Last month, Chinese authorities closed two fake Apple stores in the country's southwestern Yunnan province, including in Kunming, following a storm of publicity over the rip-off shops.

China is home to the biggest counterfeit market in the world, and despite repeated government pledges to root out fake goods these are still widely available throughout the country.

Ikea posted a significant hike in profit in 2010, as sales rose especially in China, Russia and Portugal, it said in a January report.

The flat-pack furniture empire counted 127,000 employees at the end of last year.

Europe accounted for 79 percent of sales, with North America making up 15 percent and the Asia-Australia region the rest.