

Are your World Cup tickets genuine?

With less than 25 days to go and over 2,5 million tickets sold for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, excited fans will be planning their trips to the various stadia around the country to watch the greatest sporting event in the world. However, some will unhappily miss out on their matches when they discover they are in possession of tickets that have been unlawfully sold to them.

“In the week ahead, we will see the implementation of a Regulation approved by the Minister of Trade and Industry that makes it unlawful for any entity or person to sell, or otherwise dispose of, FIFA World Cup tickets for commercial purposes”, says Clifford Green, director at Edward Nathan Sonnenbergs. “This new Regulation makes it a criminal offence for any entity or person, to engage in the unfair business practice of selling unlawful tickets without the authorisation of FIFA.” The Regulation means people and businesses selling World Cup tickets without FIFA’s permission face a fine of up to R200,000 or a maximum jail term of five years.

In addition, there is always the danger of counterfeit tickets and the authorities are preparing methods to identify these at the turnstiles. The selling and use of counterfeit tickets is inherently fraudulent and, once again, criminal prosecutions could follow.

The Department of Trade and Industry (dti) are concerned that consumers may be prejudiced by believing they can purchase tickets through avenues not authorised by FIFA and ticket holders could either lose the money they paid or not receive the tickets they paid for. This situation is made even worse when additional money has been spent on accommodation and flights. FIFA has mandated MATCH Event Services (Pty) Ltd as its exclusive agent and service provider to sell and distribute tickets and hospitality packages for the World Cup and MATCH has appointed a number of world-wide sales agents and participating tour operators who are authorised to sell official travel packages, inclusive of tickets. The appointed agents and operators can be found on the FIFA website.

A special team from FIFA's Legal Affairs Division and from MATCH Event Services are working closely with international and local authorities to take action to combat illegal offers to protect consumers from misrepresentation and fraud and avoid true football fans being cheated.

MATCH has also embarked on various ticketing enforcement initiatives to protect consumers from misrepresentation, fraud and non-delivery issues, to support the security programmes being implemented

around the World Cup by monitoring and controlling the sale of tickets, and also to protect the reputation and integrity of the event.

MATCH and FIFA have repeatedly warned the public not to purchase tickets or hospitality packages from unofficial sources and yet, even now, some large corporates are experiencing the sinking realisation that they will not be receiving their tickets after spending millions through scam ticket operators. Obviously this will tarnish South Africa's image if thousands of tourists arrive here to find that they are not allowed to watch the matches they have come to see and will also possibly prejudice South Africa's chances of staging large sporting events in the future.

Green added that, "while MATCH has been most reasonable in dealing with consumers who have purchased tickets from unlawful sources, or consumers who have contacted them to express their concerns regarding the validity of their tickets, the authorities are, at this late stage, showing a firm hand in assisting the official service providers in stamping out unauthorised ticketing."

Both the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the dti are aware of the potential prejudice to consumers and damage to South Africa that unauthorised ticket sales can cause. SAPS are independently investigating the unlawful ticket activities in the hope that charges will be brought against the culprits as soon as possible.

In addition to the pending legislation, it is a breach of the ticket terms and conditions to sell World Cup tickets unless the seller is approved by FIFA. If a ticket has not been purchased from an approved seller, it could be invalid and the disappointed supporter could be barred from entering the stadium. For those fans that are not able to attend matches due to these circumstances, an official re-sell platform has been set up through FIFA's official website (www.FIFA.com) or alternatively they can contact the call centre on 0831232010.