



VEHICLE "TITLE WASHING" SCAMS



Clients in the market for a vehicle: PLEASE NOTE that many of the flood-damaged cars from Hurricanes Harvey and Irma will be recycled into the used car market. Such vehicles are often sold at auction and then wind up on used car lots. Sometimes the vehicle's title will indicate "salvage" or "totaled," but sometimes dishonest dealers retitle the vehicle in another state and do not disclose the damage on the vehicle's title as required, a practice known as "title washing."

If a vehicle's body, engine, transmission or mechanical parts have been submerged in water, it will probably have electrical problems, and the brakes, airbags and computer system may be impaired. Unfortunately, this damage may not be readily apparent, especially to the average consumer.

To help protect consumers from unknowingly purchasing a flood-damaged vehicle, the Attorney General offers the following tips:

Check the vehicle's history by going to the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (www.vehiclehistory.gov) and entering the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN). This is the only database where all auto insurers, salvage pools that auction off totaled cars, junkyards, recyclers and self-insured entities such as rental car companies in all 50 states are required by law to report total loss vehicles within 30 days.

Look at the title. Always ask to see the title of the car before you sign anything or hand over any money. Check to see whether the car has been branded as "flood", "junk", "salvage", "rebuilt" or "reconstructed".

Look for signs of flood damage. A musty odor, water marks or faded fabrics may be a sign of flood damage. A strong detergent smell inside the car or in the engine may indicate that someone is trying to mask a mildew smell. Rust and metal flaking are another red flag. Check the upholstery, dashboard, glove compartment, trunk, inner doors, engine area, and under the seats and carpeting for mud or silt. Look for drainage holes beneath

the car. Test and retest the ignition, lights, wipers, air conditioner, heater and all accessories.

Get the car inspected by a mechanic. Have the vehicle thoroughly examined by an independent mechanic before you sign a contract or pay any money. If the dealer refuses to let you do that, go elsewhere.



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