



NEWS

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National Consumer Organizations Warn Consumers: Beware of Flood Vehicles in Hurricane Sandy Aftermath Tips for avoiding hazardous, contaminated flood cars

As tens of thousands of flood-damaged cars change hands, two national consumer organizations, Consumers for Auto Reliability and Safety (CARS) and National Consumers League (NCL), warned car buyers today to beware of new and used cars that suffered flood damage from Hurricane Sandy.

"Flood cars are ticking automotive timebombs," said Rosemary Shahan, President of CARS. "Flood cars are inherently unsafe, particularly since all the electronic systems that control the engine, brakes, air bags, and other vital safety systems are hopelessly contaminated and will inevitably fail."

Even consumers buying cars far away from where Sandy hit should be on the lookout for flood cars. "Flood damaged vehicles can be shipped across the country in a matter of days," said Sally Greenberg, Executive Director of NCL. "Consumers throughout the US need to take specific steps to protect themselves from inadvertently buying these **hazardous** vehicles."

CARS and NCL offered these tips for used car buyers -- BEFORE you agree to buy:

- Check the vehicle history, entering the unique Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) (found on the driver's side under the windshield) at the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS), established by the US Department of Justice, at www.vehiclehistory.gov. 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. Many are reporting daily. Vehicle histories can be obtained for between \$3 and \$13.

- ALWAYS get the vehicle you are considering inspected by your own independent, reliable, trustworthy auto technician prior to purchase -- including when buying from a car dealer, an individual, or over the internet. A good place to find a good auto technician is Car Talk's Mechanics files, at:

<http://www.cartalk.com/mechanics-search>

- ALWAYS insist on seeing the title to the car before you buy, and check to see if it has been branded as "flood," "junk," "salvage" "rebuilt" "reconstructed" or another brand indicating it was severely damaged. But beware: a "clean" title does not prove the car is OK -- the title may have been "laundered" across state lines or altered to conceal the brand. One dealer reportedly used a hole punch to remove the "flood" brand on the title.
- If you buy over the internet -- NEVER send money to someone over the Internet in exchange for a motor vehicle. Some sellers masquerade as the owners, when in fact they don't even have proper title to the car. The car may even be stolen -- so you could lose both your money and the car, and may be subject to arrest for receiving stolen property. Instead, insist on meeting the seller at your state's motor vehicle department to do the title transfer, or if you belong to AAA, you may be able to do the title transfer there.

In addition, be on the lookout for both new and used cars with tell-tale signs of having been submerged. Watch out for:

- Musty or "over-perfumed" smell or signs of mold or mildew
- Silt or residue in places like under carpeting, in the well where the spare is stored, or in the dashboard dials
- Title or registration histories indicating the car was in the flood area
- Car hesitates, runs rough, or shows signs of premature rust or corrosion in places where you wouldn't expect to see rust
- New cars or "certified" used cars where the manufacturer refuses to honor the warranty -- check with the manufacturer if you're suspicious, and insist on getting a commitment in writing from the manufacturer itself that it will honor the warranty

“Shady car dealers and other unscrupulous people are salivating over the new bumper crop of flood cars. Don't fall prey to their scams.” said Shahan.

Links:

NMVTIS <http://www.vehiclehistory.gov/>

CARS website <http://www.carconsumers.org>

National Consumers League website: <http://www.nclnet.org/personal-finance/64-fraud/488-car-shopping-avoid-scams>

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