

Buyer Beware: Safety Hazards of Flood-Damaged Vehicles

Millions of people in the eastern United States have suffered property damage and loss, widespread power outages, and major flooding caused by Hurricane Sandy. As recovery and restoration efforts get underway, it is extremely important for consumers to be aware of the safety impact of floods on their vehicles. Severe water damage can make vehicles' electrical systems, including their airbag sensors, prone to failure. When a vehicle's electrical systems have been compromised, it may no longer be safe or roadworthy. After Hurricane Katrina, for example, truckloads of flooded vehicles were taken out of Louisiana to states as far away as the upper Midwest, where they were dried out, cleaned, and sold. Purchasers of those vehicles may not have known that the vehicles had endured a saltwater flood that damaged their electrical systems.

The National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS) is designed to protect prospective buyers of used vehicles from concealed vehicle histories. Created by federal law, this system is the only publicly available system in the country that requires all insurance carriers, auto recyclers, junk and salvage yards, and states to report vehicle history information. An NMVTIS vehicle history report provides information on the five key indicators associated with preventing vehicle-related fraud and theft:

- current state of title and last title date;
- brand history, a descriptive label assigned by states to indicate a vehicle's current or prior state—for example: “junk,” “salvage,” “flood;”
- odometer reading;
- total loss history; and
- salvage history.

If a vehicle has a brand, total loss, or salvage history, then the consumer is warned that the vehicle may be unsafe (an NMVTIS report does *not* include repair histories, recall information, and other care and maintenance data available in alternative vehicle history reports).

Shop smart. Make sure you obtain an independent vehicle inspection and have all the information about a vehicle before you buy.

For more information about NMVTIS, visit www.vehiclehistory.gov.