



BRIAN E. FROSH, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL
CONSUMER ALERT

Consumer Alert: Attorney General Frosh Warns Consumers about Purchasing Flood-Damaged Cars

BALTIMORE, MD (October 12, 2022) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh today warned consumers to be cautious of purchasing vehicles that may have been impacted by major flood damage. After hurricanes with large-scale floods like Ian, flood-damaged cars often end up at salvage auctions and bought by rebuilders. While these vehicles should be marked “salvage” or “total loss” on the title, dishonest sellers may “wash” the title, hide the damage, and offer these vehicles for sale.

“Consumers purchasing a used car after a hurricane should always be wary that the vehicle may be irreparably damaged and not the good deal it appears to be,” said Attorney General Frosh.

Signs of a flooded vehicle may include:

- A musty odor in the interior, which might be covered with a strong air-freshener;
- Upholstery or carpeting which is loose, stained, doesn’t match, is new, or is damp;
- Rust around doors, under the dashboard, on the pedals, or inside the hood and trunk latches;
- Mud or silt in the glove compartment or under the seats;
- Brittle wires under the dashboard; and/or
- Fog or moisture beads in the interior or exterior lights or instrument panel.

Attorney General Frosh advises consumers to follow these tips to protect themselves and avoid purchasing flood-damaged vehicles:

- Check the VIN history. The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) has a free database that can tell you if a car has been marked as salvage, stolen, etc. Note, rental vehicles may not make it into this database. Consumers can check the vehicle history by visiting: www.nicb.org/theft_and_fraud_awareness/vincheck
- Check the title. If the VIN number clears the NICB, consumers should then check the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, a program administered by the U.S.

Department of Justice, at: www.vehiclehistory.gov/nmvtis_vehiclehistory.html. There may be a fee to obtain reports through this service. The history reports provide current and previous state of title data, title issue date, latest odometer data, theft history data (if any), any brand assigned to a vehicle and date applied, and salvage history, including designations of a “total loss” (if any).

- Additional resources. If the VIN and title checks clear, consumers may use paid sources, such as CarFax or AutoCheck.
- Inspection: Consumers should thoroughly inspect their prospective vehicles, even if the vehicle clears all reports. Salvagers clean vehicles extensively. However, not all flood damage is visible.

Consumers who suspect they may have purchased a flood-damaged vehicle may file a complaint with the Office of Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division by visiting www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov.

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2022/101222CA.pdf>