



ANTHONY G. BROWN, MARYLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts:
press@oag.state.md.us
410-576-7009

CONSUMER ALERT: Office of Attorney General, MVA, Warn Consumers about Purchasing Flood-Damaged Cars

BALTIMORE, MD (November 25, 2024) – Attorney General Anthony G. Brown and the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) are partnering to warn consumers in the market for a used car to be aware of flood damaged vehicles originating from states recently impacted by hurricanes and flooding. This alert was issued to all consumers who have subscribed to receive consumer information from our office. Consumers can subscribe to this list here: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MDAG/subscriber/new>.

“Marylanders shouldn’t spend their hard-earned money on a car that is unsafe or doesn’t work,” said **Attorney General Anthony G. Brown**. “Buying a car is a significant investment of time and money. We urge everyone to do their due diligence before making a such a purchase.”

“The MVA has implemented programs – such as the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System - which is designed to protect consumers from fraud and unsafe vehicles from being resold, however customers must still do their due diligence when purchasing a used vehicle,” said **Motor Vehicle Administrator Chrissy Nizer**. “Vehicles that have flood damage may look good on the surface, but the irreversible damage may not always be visible. It’s incredibly important to do your research and know what to look for.”

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 that is loose, stained, doesn’t match, 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.

Many signs of flood damage are not always obvious, such as water damage compromising the car’s computer and safety mechanisms, including airbag sensors. The MVA and the OAG have the following tips for consumers looking to buy a vehicle:

- Take the time to inspect the vehicle. Check the engine for a high-water mark on the engine block or radiator. Look for rust or corrosion on wires and other components under the hood. Don’t forget to check the trunk and under the spare tire for any water marks.

www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov

- Shop at a licensed dealer. Flood damaged vehicles often end up at auctions or sold by “curb stoners.” Curb stoning is a way for unscrupulous sellers to avoid laws. They may pose as a private seller or through an online service. Not all private sellers are curb stoning, but you should check thoroughly before making the purchase.
- Check the Vehicle Identification Number (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 [here](#). There are several other resources that can provide a detailed history of the car including:
 - Carfax (www.carfax.com);
 - Auto Check (www.autocheck.com); and
 - Consumer Guide (www.consumerguide.com).
- Consider taking the car to a qualified mechanic to inspect the vehicle thoroughly.

The MVA receives real-time alerts through the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS). All jurisdictions in the continental United States participate in NMVTIS by contributing title and brand information, including flood damaged vehicles. When a customer titles and registers a vehicle in Maryland, their vehicle information number and title number is run through NMVTIS to ensure information is accurate and up to date. For more information about purchasing a vehicle in Maryland, visit MVA’s website [here](#).

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

###

<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/press/2024/112524CA.pdf>