



*The District Attorney's
Disaster Response Team says:*

DON'T BE A VICTIM!

SCAM ALERT: STORM-DAMAGED AUTOS & BOATS

Thousands of Gulf Coast automobiles were flooded in recent hurricanes. Unscrupulous dealers buy these vehicles, then dry and clean them to hide flood damage.

Special insurance industry teams from the National Insurance Crime Bureau (1-800-835-6422) have been dispatched to Baton Rouge and Mobile to create a registry of vehicles damaged by Hurricane Katrina to prevent their fraudulent resale to unsuspecting consumers in the future.

Here's how NICB says you can avoid buying a storm-damaged used vehicle:

- ✓ Select a reputable car dealer.
- ✓ Inspect the vehicle for water stains, mildew, sand or silt under the carpets, floor mats, headliner cloth and behind the dashboard.
- ✓ Check for recently shampooed carpet.
- ✓ Inspect the interior upholstery and door panels for fading.
- ✓ Check for rust on screws in the console or areas where water normally doesn't reach.
- ✓ Check for mud or grit in the spare tire compartment, alternator crevices, behind wiring harnesses, around the small recesses of starter motors, power steering pumps and relays.
- ✓ Check inside the seatbelt retractors by pulling the seatbelt all the way out and inspect for moisture, mildew or grime.

- ✓ Check door speakers – they will often be damaged due to flooding.
- ✓ Have a certified mechanic inspect the vehicle prior to purchasing it.
- ✓ Ask about the vehicle's history. Ask whether it was in any accidents or floods.
- ✓ Inspect the title and ownership papers for any potential or questionable salvage fraud.
- ✓ Conduct a title search of the vehicle.
- ✓ Look under the hood for signs of oxidation. Pull back rubber boots around electrical and mechanical connections for these indicators:
 - Ferrous materials will show signs of rust
 - Copper will show a green patina
 - Aluminum and alloys will have a white powder and pitting.
- ✓ **Trust your instincts: If you don't like the answers or the deal sounds too good to be true, walk away!**

To find out whether the vehicle or watercraft you want to buy has been hurricane-damaged, input the VIN (vehicle identification number) or HIN (hull identification number) at this website:

www.nicb.org

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REPORT SUSPECTED FRAUD

Mobile County District Attorney
(251) 574-8400

www.mobile-da.org

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The District Attorney's Disaster Response Team is a network of Mobile County's leading financial institutions, business and professional organizations, government agencies and law enforcement officials working together to help protect victims of Hurricane Katrina.

We urge all our citizens to remain vigilant, to protect themselves, and to report all suspected crime as we repair and rebuild Mobile County in the coming months.

-- District Attorney John M. Tyson Jr.