

Salvage laws were put into effect to give the vehicle-buying public a way to know that a vehicle has been badly damaged or declared to be a "total loss" due to damage at some point in its history.

A Bad Reputation

Of course, the image conjured by the word "salvaged" is often one of an unreliable, wrecked, junk car that is completely unsafe and should be avoided at all costs.

This is not always the case?some salvaged cars have been declared a total loss but can be restored to good, functioning, safe transportation. They can even be made to look good again, too!

Purchasing a Salvage

But beware of those good looks! Just because a car looks great on the exterior and interior, and just because you can't see any particular damage to the engine compartment when you lift the hood, does not mean that you are buying a safe and reliable vehicle.

On the other hand, not all salvaged vehicles are unreliable, unsafe, or otherwise unsuitable for transportation. The damage may have been very "fixable" but the cost prohibited the insurance company from doing so.

If such a vehicle is sold for salvage value and then repaired, and if the repairs have been done by a reputable and qualified repair person, then the vehicle would be "road-worthy" and should be considered a safe purchase.

Salvage Laws

If a car is involved in a collision, the cost to repair is compared to the value of the vehicle immediately before the accident. In Oklahoma, if the repair costs meet 60% of the value of the car before the accident, there is a good chance that the vehicle will be deemed "totaled" and sold for the salvage value.

Once a vehicle has been salvaged, the certificate of title is sent to the Oklahoma Tax Commission (OTC) and a new title indicating the salvaged status will be issued, thus "branding" the title.

Full Disclosure

If a vehicle has spent its life in Oklahoma, it is simple enough; just look at the title to see whether or not it has been declared "totaled" and subsequently salvaged. The "full disclosure" titling rules in Oklahoma make purchasing a used vehicle a safer buy than it is in states without title "branding" and disclosure of salvaged status.

The problem is, not every used vehicle sold in Oklahoma has spent its life in Oklahoma. There are no federal guidelines for salvaged vehicle and other states may not be as thorough as Oklahoma in the "branding" of a salvaged vehicle.

Flood Damaged Cars

Be aware of vehicles being sold on the market with concealed flood damage.

Unfortunately, the reason these vehicles were designated as "totaled" in the first place is due to the water damage to the electronics systems. Many of these cars on the market now were completely submerged in the floodwaters.

When the electronic systems are exposed to water, they may be "dried out" temporarily, but will continue to deteriorate, causing the vehicle to become unreliable or, worse, to fail at highway speeds. These failures can cause collisions or even render a vehicle uncontrollable. For suggestions on protection from unscrupulous used vehicle dealers, read our section on buying and selling a motor vehicle.

Another way to protect yourself is to look into a vehicle history report. All you need is the vehicle identification number (VIN). This is an excellent way to get the true history of a used car.