

In South Dakota, a vehicle is considered to be salvaged when an insurance company or self-insurer declares it to be a "total loss due to damage caused by fire, vandalism, collision, weather, submersion in water, or flood."

Once this happens, a couple of things may occur. If the insurance company or self-insurer takes ownership of the vehicle, the vehicle owner must surrender the title. Then, the insurance company or self-insurer must apply for a salvage title within 30 days.

On the other hand, if you choose to keep possession of the vehicle, you're responsible for obtaining a salvage title before you sell the vehicle or transfer the title.

It's important to note that salvaged titles are only required when the vehicle is less than seven years old, or if the vehicle weighs under 16,000 pounds.

### Rebuilt Title

Once a salvage title has been obtained, you are free to apply for a rebuilt title. Before doing so, the vehicle must at least be operational. Then, you'll need to register your vehicle.

To register, you'll need to fill out these two forms:

Application for Motor Vehicle Title and Registration

Affidavit for Rebuilt Vehicles (MV-950)

Then, the vehicle will have to be inspected by the Highway Patrol, or by the Department of Revenue & Regulation. If the vehicle passes the inspection, you will be given a completed certificate of inspection.

Make sure to save all the receipts for parts or repairs. You'll need to attach these to your registration.

You may register your vehicle at the treasurer's office in the county where you live. If you are not going to register the vehicle yourself, you must complete a power of attorney document and give it to the person who will be signing the registration for you.

Bring all repair and parts receipts, the salvage title, and the inspection certificate to the treasurer's office. Be prepared to pay a \$25 vehicle identification number (VIN) fee.

If everything checks out, and you have paid all taxes and fees due, you will then receive your registration and new plates.

After the Division of Motor Vehicles has cleared everything, you will be granted a rebuilt title, which costs \$5.

### Buyer Beware

There's another side to salvaged vehicles, and it's one of which potential used car buyers must be aware.

Auto fraud takes on many forms and methods, but one of the more common types is trying to hide or misrepresent the condition or history of the vehicle.

Of course, this is illegal. Dealers and individuals are required to tell you before you buy a vehicle if it has a salvaged title or was in a serious accident. But, some will fail to do so.

So, it's up to you, as the consumer, to be a good detective. You may want to start by doing a title or lien search on the vehicle. Or, you may want to obtain a Vehicle History Report.

Also, check the vehicle over thoroughly. Many salvaged vehicles may look alright, but have underlying problems such as bad brakes, difficult handling, and poor welding.

It's a good idea to have a trusted mechanic inspect the vehicle for you. The extra cost now may save you many hours of frustration later. If the seller refuses to allow your mechanic to take a look at the vehicle, just walk away from the sale.

If you have the slightest sense that the vehicle might have been in a flood, check for signs of water damage. Look under floor mats and in the trunk for dirt or mud. Check for dampness under the seats, in the trunk, and under the hood. See if you can detect waterstains anywhere.

If you suspect that the vehicle may have been in a serious accident, take a close look at the paint. Make sure it matches evenly throughout the vehicle, including on the inside of the door frame. Check for even spacing between the hood, trunk, and doors.

Even if the seller is honest with you, and discloses that the vehicle has been salvaged, be wary.

Just because a vehicle has been rebuilt doesn't mean it's safe to drive, or that it won't fall apart (literally) a week after you buy it. Additionally, the vehicle may be from a state that has very relaxed standards for salvage titles.

Remember, when it comes to buying any used vehicle, you just can't be careful enough.