

Consumers and dealers alike are particularly concerned about salvaged vehicles from floods and hurricanes.

Many of these vehicles eventually find their way back onto the market with a "salvage-branded" title. The title is stamped "salvage" to forever indicate the vehicle has been seriously damaged; those that have been repaired to streetworthiness are branded "rebuilt salvage." There is no problem with buying a salvage or rebuilt salvage car, as long as potential purchasers are aware of the status.

However, it is possible for some vehicles to shake off their salvage title status over the course of several transactions across several states (this is done intentionally by unscrupulous sellers). Therefore, both dealers and buyers need to be aware that the number of salvaged vehicles on the market has increased dramatically because of the hurricane, and this situation will continue for the next several years even without additional major storms.

Experts recommend that if you suspect a car has been in a flood, you should check for water stains on the interior, musty odors, and rust on screws in the console or other places where it would be unlikely to appear normally.

To help buyers look out for fraud, the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) maintains a database of all cars declared flood-damaged or salvaged in other states. Be aware, though, that because this system is dependent on the reporting practices of other states, some vehicles with salvage-branded titles might not show up.

Before you buy a used vehicle, you may want to perform a complete title search. There are many independent companies who will provide unbiased multi-state research for you based on the car's vehicle identification number. This is often called a vehicle history report, and it can be well worth the small fee to find out all about a vehicle's past before you buy it.

If you discover you have purchased a salvaged vehicle that was not marked as such, then you are a victim of fraud. You can contact the Texas Attorney General's office for assistance:

Office of the Attorney General

300 W. 15th St.

Austin, TX 78701

(512) 463-2100

How to Get a Salvage or Rebuilt Salvage Title

Texas has strict guidelines about what constitutes a salvage vehicle, how to go about getting a salvage title issued, who may buy or sell a salvage vehicle, and how to bring a vehicle out of salvage status. Before attempting to either get a salvage title or to repair a salvage vehicle and return it to the road, we recommend that you read the very comprehensive (at 171 pages) Salvage Dealer and Motor Vehicle Information publication issued by the TxDMV.

It's all a bit confusing, so if you're still not clear about how to title and register a salvage or a rebuilt salvage car, feel free to contact a regional Vehicle Titles and Registration Division office or call the VTR help desk at (512) 465-7611.

If you are reclaiming vehicles that are damaged or have been previously declared totaled, there are many Texas salvage vehicle forms for this purpose.