

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) defines a salvaged vehicle as one that is either inoperable or unable to pass a state safety inspection without the owner having to spend more on repairs than the vehicle is actually worth.

Though you can't register or drive them, salvage-branded vehicles are legal to buy, sell, and own. The manner in which some of them are falsely sold, however, upsets the authorities.

There have been a growing number of cases of devious car dealers selling salvaged vehicles with impeccable exteriors but with blemished engines or chassis that cannot be detected by the untrained eye. To cover your back against such fiendish practices, Pennsylvania requires a stringent titling and registration process for all salvaged vehicles so that buyers know what they're getting.

Registering and Titling

To register a vehicle with a salvage title, you'll need to show proof that it was satisfactorily repaired and then apply for a rebuilt-salvage title.

Submit form MV-1 (Application for Certificate of Title), unless the Pennsylvania Certificate of Salvage is already in the name of the applicant. This form cannot be downloaded, but you can pick one up at any Driver License Center location.

Submit either form MV-5 (it, also, cannot be downloaded) or an out-of-state certificate of salvage.

Submit an Application for Reconstructed, Specially Constructed, or Modified Vehicle. Detailed instructions are included in the file.

Send four color photos of the vehicle (front, back, and both sides).

Attach a bill of sale or receipts for parts used to fix the vehicle. You can download, if needed, a generic bill of sale.

Include form MV-41 to apply for a vehicle identification number plate (only if one is needed).

Enclose all applicable fees (\$22.50 for a title and \$36 for registration).

The vehicle will need to be inspected by a PennDOT-approved station, and the inspector will need to sign the application form (so bring along all your paperwork). Among other things, the inspector will check to make sure that the car and its parts were not stolen.

Submit all information to:

Bureau of Motor Vehicles

Research and Support Operations Section

P.O. Box 68031

Harrisburg, PA 17106

Declaring a Vehicle Salvage

To apply for an original certificate of salvage, complete an Application for Nonrepairable or Salvage Certificate. You must be the current owner and surrender the title.