

CAN YOU SPOT A FLOOD DAMAGED VEHICLE?

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Department of Motor Vehicles (804) 367-6623
DMV Offers Tips for Water Damaged Vehicles
DMV Also Cautions Buyers to Look for Vehicle Flood Damage on Future Car Purchases

RICHMOND - If you have more than one thousand dollars in water damage to your vehicle, Virginia law requires that you notify the Department of Motor Vehicles - even if you plan to keep driving the vehicle. After contacting your insurance agent, vehicle owners must visit a DMV customer service center with the vehicle title so the agency can brand the document as water-damaged. "We recommend vehicle owners do this as soon as possible to protect themselves and others," said DMV Commissioner D.B. Smit. "If a water-damaged vehicle is re-sold, and is later involved in a crash, the person you sold the vehicle to could sue you if the water damage was not reported to DMV and contributed to the crash," added Smit. The dangers of water-damaged cars are often hidden. Aside from mold and rust, electrical systems could erode and fail over time. Computer sensors could be damaged, and safety protections like air bags could fail in a crash.

DMV also cautions consumers to watch for water damage if they plan to buy a used or new vehicle. "We want buyers to be aware of the possibility that both new and used vehicles may have water damage from a recent flooding," warned Smit. "Nearly one out of every three car sales occurs directly between individuals; so, I caution consumers who plan to purchase a vehicle in the future to be aware of the possibility of water damage." While there is no sure method to test for vehicle flood damage, experts offer several inspection tips that may help detect significant water damage. At a minimum, a prospective buyer should: Examine the interior and the engine compartment for evidence of water and grit from suspected submersion.

Check for recently shampooed carpet and under the floorboard carpet for water residue or stain marks from evaporated water not related to air-conditioning pan leaks. Look for rusting on the inside of the car and under interior carpeting and visually inspect all interior upholstery and door panels for evidence of fading.

Check under the dashboard for dried mud and residue, and note any evidence of mold or a musty odor in the upholstery, carpet or trunk. Check for rust on screws in the console or other areas where water would normally not reach unless submerged.

Check for mud or grit in alternator crevices, behind wiring harnesses and around the small recesses of starter motors, power steering pumps and relays. Complete a detailed inspection of the electrical wiring system, looking for rusted components, water residue or suspicious corrosion. Inspect the undercarriage or other components for evidence of rust and flaking metal that would not normally be associated with late model vehicles. While these inspection suggestions will not detect flood damage in every case, they do provide some information to protect consumers from purchasing a vehicle damaged by floodwaters. If you are purchasing a vehicle that you suspect may have been damaged by flooding, consider having it inspected by a licensed mechanic.

Other Important Tips:

If you lost your vehicle in the flood or from other circumstance, be sure to deactivate your registration and plates by calling 1-866-DMV-LINE or visiting a DMV customer service center. Anytime you sell, trade or dispose of your vehicle, or change your address, remember, Virginia law requires you to notify DMV. Visit the [Department of Motor Vehicles](#) or review your registration card for more information.