



NEWS RELEASE

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DMV Warns Customers about Potentially Water-Damaged Vehicles Offers Tips to Learn Vehicle's History; Spot Flood Damage Before Purchasing

RICHMOND – The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) reminds vehicle buyers to conduct a water-damage inspection before buying used or new vehicles. 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.

“Storms throughout the year can produce flooding, which in turn can lead to water-damaged cars in Virginia. Plus, the potential also exists for damaged out-of-state cars to find their way to the Commonwealth,” said DMV Commissioner Richard D. Holcomb. “I caution Virginia consumers to check for water damage when purchasing any new or used vehicle.”

Various state laws require water damage to be reported and disclosed on a vehicle's title; however, dishonest sellers can find ways around these requirements, putting buyers at risk. If a vehicle is branded as non-repairable, the vehicle cannot be titled in Virginia, but a non-repairable car could be titled in another state. If a Virginian then purchased that car and tried to title it in Virginia, the vehicle's history would show non-repairable, and the customer would not be able to title that car.

Virginia Code § 46.2-624 requires insurance companies to report to DMV when they have paid a claim of \$3,500 or more on a vehicle due to water damage. Insurers are required to notify DMV of such water damage, even if the owner intends to retain ownership and continue driving the vehicle.

One tool customers can use to check a vehicle's history is DMV's Prospective Purchaser Inquiry (PPI). Prior to purchase, you provide the vehicle's make, model and vehicle identification number (VIN) and DMV produces a PPI summary about the vehicle. The PPI summary comes from Virginia DMV records only and does not contain personal information about the vehicle's previous owners. The fee for the service is \$12 per vehicle. This service is available [online](#) or by visiting a DMV office.

Other inspection tips that may help detect significant water damage include:

- Examine the interior and the engine compartment for evidence of water and grit from suspected submersion.
- Check for recently shampooed carpet, and check 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 considering purchasing a vehicle that you suspect may have been damaged by flooding, consider having it inspected by a licensed mechanic.

Photos illustrating water-damaged vehicles available upon request. Contact sunni.brown@dmv.virginia.gov

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