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## Online System Can Help Consumers Avoid Buying Flood-Damaged Vehicles

On August 29th, the sixth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Irene was devastating the eastern coastline of the United States. Irene – the first hurricane of the 2011 season – was thankfully not as destructive as the 2005 storm that ravaged New Orleans and the Gulf Coast area. Nevertheless, the remnants of Tropical Storm Lee and Hurricane Irene caused major flooding and evacuations from Vermont to North Carolina.

As recovery efforts are underway, one flood-related hazard consumers may want to keep in mind is the impact of floods on vehicles. Severe water damage can make vehicles' electrical systems, including their airbag sensors, prone to failure. Despite compromised electrical systems, these vehicles may be dried out, cleaned, and readied for sale.

Consumers can protect themselves from unknowingly buying a flood-damaged vehicle by purchasing a National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS) Vehicle History Report available at [www.vehiclehistory.gov](http://www.vehiclehistory.gov). This System was created by federal law and is the only publicly available system in the country that requires all insurance carriers, auto recyclers, junk and salvage yards and states to report vehicle information. Currently, there are 35 million salvage or total loss records in the System. In addition, 87 percent of the country's Department of Motor Vehicle data is represented in the System.

A NMVTIS Vehicle History Report provides information on the five key indicators associated with preventing vehicle-related fraud and theft: 1) current state of title and last title date; 2) brand history, a descriptive label assigned by states to indicate a vehicle's current or prior state—for example: "junk," "salvage," "flood;" 3) odometer reading; 4) total loss history; and 5) salvage history. The report also helps consumers: a) verify the validity of the title to prevent fraud and b) identify vehicles that are potentially unsafe—if a vehicle has a brand, total loss, or salvage history, then the consumer is warned that the vehicle may be unsafe. A NMVTIS Vehicle History Report does not include vehicle repair histories, recall information, and other care and maintenance data available in alternative vehicle history reports.

For more information about NMVTIS, visit [www.vehiclehistory.gov](http://www.vehiclehistory.gov).