

ConsumerAlert

Air Bag Fraud: The Hidden Danger

(NAPS)—Guarding against air bag fraud—when a damaged air bag system is replaced with a non-functioning “dummy” air bag—could help used car shoppers steer clear of danger.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that about half of fatal accidents with nondeployed air bags involve cars that have missing or faulty air bags. Additionally, industry experts caution that as many as one out of every 25 previously damaged vehicles inspected had nonfunctional air bags.

Understanding The Threat

Dummy air bag systems are often stolen or salvaged units and may not match the particular make and model of your car. Victims of air bag fraud have even reported finding paper towels, packing peanuts, old shoes or virtually anything else that can fill the hole left by the missing air bag. Many of us assume the air bag will be there when we need it, so most victims don't know they've been scammed until it's too late.

Staying Safe

Fortunately, there are ways to protect yourself:

- Ask for or order a Carfax Vehicle History Report to check for salvage or junk titles, accidents in the vehicle's past or “air bag deployed” notations. If any of these red flags shows up, the air bag may have been deployed and you should have it closely inspected. Remember, even if it remained undeployed, the air bag system may still have been affected by a crash.



Consumers can protect themselves from air bag fraud by asking for a vehicle history report.

- Take the vehicle to an ASE-certified air bag mechanic for inspection prior to purchase to ensure a properly working air bag system.

- Turn on the ignition. The air bag indicator light should appear momentarily and then go out. If the indicator light remains on or flashes, this may indicate that an air bag system problem exists. Take the vehicle to a qualified mechanic for further inspection.

- If the air bag light never comes on, it's highly likely the air bag is missing and the bulb has been removed. Air bag lights may also not come on if the previous owner had an on-off switch installed. If you face this situation, ask the owner or dealer to provide a copy of the NHTSA letter authorizing the switch and have the air bag turned back on.

For more information and a free air bag deployment report, visit www.carfax.com/airbag.