

Automotive Safety

Air Bag Fraud: What Car Buyers Should Know

(NAPSA)—According to the National Association of Consumer Advocates and the Consumer Federation of America, each year, approximately 2.5 million vehicles are totaled by insurance companies and issued salvage titles. More than a million of those—about 40 percent—were rebuilt and put back on the road.

But just because a car is considered road worthy doesn't mean it's safe. A serious accident can damage a vehicle's air bag system so that it may not function, even if the air bag didn't deploy. Perhaps of even greater concern is the possibility of air bag fraud—or improper replacement of the air bag after deployment.

The California Highway Alliance recently found that one out of every 25 previously damaged vehicles inspected had phony or dummy air bags. A dummy system can consist of:

- Nonfunctioning, outdated or inappropriate air bags for the make, model and year of the vehicle.
 - No air bag at all—a replacement air bag system cover has been used to cosmetically repair the air bag compartment.
 - Everything from packing peanuts to paper towels, old shoes to aluminum cans stuffed into the steering wheel and dashboard air bag compartments to fill the space that should be taken up by the air bag.
 - Air bags—taken from salvaged or junked cars—that have not been thoroughly tested to ensure function and safety.
- “Replacement air bag systems



Salvaged vehicles may be the subject of air bag fraud, a dangerous prospect for drivers.

may range from \$1,000 to \$3,000, maybe more if the dashboard shell or other dash components are damaged by the force of a passenger-side deployment,” says Larry Gamache of Carfax. “Dishonest mechanics can generate a lot of money taking advantage of the unsuspecting consumer.”

Carfax Vehicle History Reports can indicate salvage (junk) titled vehicles and vehicles that have been involved in major accidents and, in some states, note air bag deployment. Car buyers should ask sellers for a vehicle history report and see if the car has ever been branded “salvage.”

To check a vehicle, turn on the ignition. The air bag indicator light should appear momentarily and then go out. If the light flashes or never comes on, take it to a certified air bag mechanic for inspection prior to purchase to ensure a properly working air bag system.

To learn more about air bag fraud or to obtain a vehicle history report, visit www.carfax.com.