

# Auto Safety Report

## Fighting The Fraud That Can Be Fatal

(NAPSA)—Safety experts are working on ways to drive down the risk of injuries and death due to auto accidents.

They are, however, running into problems from a surprising source: airbag fraud. It's on the rise and may soon rank as one of the worst vehicle repair scams out there—and a potentially fatal one. The average buyer may never know whether the airbag is there, until it's too late.

Last year, 2.5 million vehicles were totaled by insurance companies and issued salvage titles. More than one million of those—or two out of every five—were rebuilt and put back on the road. Even if the accident was minor, if the airbag deployed, airbag fraud is a risk factor.

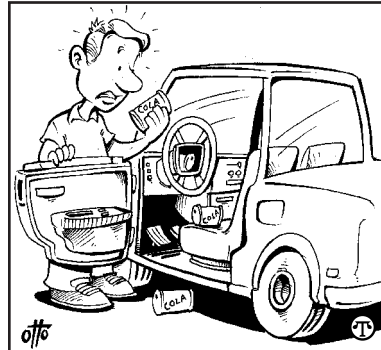
According to the California Highway Alliance, one out of every 25 previously damaged vehicles inspected had phony airbags. Airbag systems are expensive to replace, so dishonest mechanics keep costs down and profits up by using incorrect, outdated or no system at all to replace the deployed bags. Since it's virtually impossible for consumers to tell just by looking that dummy airbags were used, they purchase improperly repaired vehicles.

The experts at Carfax.com recommend consumers perform the following checks to determine if an airbag is in good working order:

When turning on the ignition:

- The airbag indicator light should appear momentarily and then go out.

- If indicator light remains on or flashes, there may be an air bag system problem. Take the vehicle to a qualified mechanic for



**Victims of airbag fraud have found everything stuffed into steering wheel and dashboard airbag compartments from packing peanuts to paper towels, old shoes to aluminum cans.**

further inspection.

- If the light NEVER comes on, there could be a serious problem. The air bag may be missing and the bulb removed.

Airbag lights may not come on if the previous owner has had an on-off switch installed. Ask owner or dealer to provide a copy of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's letter authorizing the switch and have the airbag turned back on.

Car buyers should ask for a vehicle history report and see if the car has been in an accident. Carfax.com offers an easy way for consumers to find out if a vehicle has been in a major crash. If the seller doesn't offer one, log on to [www.Carfax.com](http://www.Carfax.com) or call toll free 1-888-4CARFAX (1-888-422-7329). Using this information and taking the vehicle to a certified airbag mechanic for inspection PRIOR to purchase can ensure a properly working airbag system and provide peace of mind.