

# The Active Consumer

## Airbag Scams Threaten Safety, Lives

(NAPSA)—In the wake of Hurricane Katrina and Rita, hundreds of thousands of vehicles have been flooded. Many will be salvaged and bought by dishonest dealers and wholesalers. The vehicles will then be sold around the country with fake titles that hide their watery histories. Many will have water-damaged airbags that don't work, putting the lives of countless drivers and passengers in jeopardy.

Katrina and Rita spotlight a larger public safety problem with airbag fraud, warns the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud ([www.InsuranceFraud.org](http://www.InsuranceFraud.org)). Many cars now on the road could have nonworking airbags or no airbags at all. But drivers and passengers won't be able to tell until they're in a crash and the airbag doesn't open.

### The Scams

After a crash, a crooked body shop removes an inflated airbag or pulls out an uninflated airbag so it looks like it deployed. The body shop then replaces the airbag with sneakers, beer cans and other junk, or inserts a dummy airbag or unsafe airbag that's not made for your vehicle. The motive? Greed. A dishonest bodyshop will illegally charge an insurance company up to \$2,000 for a new airbag, the coalition warns.

### The Dangers

Safety: You and your passengers could die or be seriously hurt if you're in a crash without working airbags. You could be driving a time bomb on four wheels. Insurance fraud also raises everyone's premiums, including your own.

### The Stats

Overall, at least 400,000 rebuilt wrecks drive America's roadways, and thousands more could enter the market as flooded



**Cars with a damaged past may have airbags that don't work.**

cars from the Gulf Coast are resold.

Crooked bodyshops already are stuffing fake and unsafe airbags into more non-flooded cars throughout America. In the Miami area alone, police found thousands of fake airbags, including one body shop that had more than 6,000 airbag shells.

### How to Fight Back

Before you buy a used or salvaged vehicle, have a certified mechanic who you trust inspect the airbag. Get the vehicle's history report and see if the car has been in any accidents. Also, check out the dashboard airbag indicator light. It should come on for a few seconds and then stop. You may have a problem if the light stays on, or doesn't come on at all. Take it to a qualified mechanic for inspection.

Also, don't try to open the airbag compartment yourself. You could be injured and damage the airbag. Finally, find out if the repair shop has a history of complaints and be sure to check your local Better Business Bureau.

Visit [www.InsuranceFraud.org](http://www.InsuranceFraud.org) to learn more about airbag scams and how to avoid these type of frauds.