

Ask Auto Andy

(NAPSA)—Dear Auto Andy:

I was channel surfing when I caught a news program talking about “fake airbags.” Can you tell me what a fake airbag is and how I’d know if I had one?—C.D. in PA

Dear C.D.:

Fake or dummy airbags are, in many cases, no airbag at all—it’s a repair scam on the rise. The problem is that airbags are not something you use until you have to, which means you may not know it’s missing until you’re in the middle of an accident.

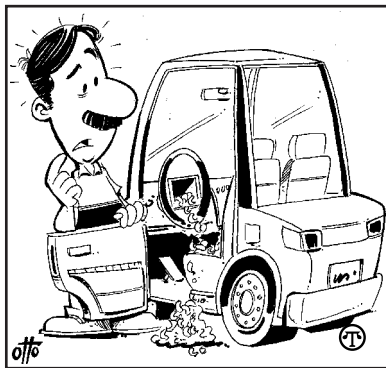
Since replacing a blown airbag can be an expensive proposition (anywhere from \$1,000 and \$3,000), some scam artists figured out that if they loaded the airbag compartment with filler while charging for the replacement, they could make a tidy profit. Filler materials can include outdated or inappropriate airbag units, or just packing peanuts, paper towels or rags. Really anything that takes up space.

The experts at Carfax.com offer these self-checks to determine if an airbag is in good working order—when turning on the ignition, look at the airbag indicator light:

- It should go on for a moment, and then go off.
- If it remains on or flashes, this may indicate a problem.
- If it NEVER comes on, this indicates a serious problem.

If you think there’s a problem, take the vehicle to a qualified airbag mechanic for inspection.

Here’s a caveat: Airbag lights



Before buying a used car, get a vehicle history report and get the car inspected—not just for fake airbags, but for your peace of mind.

may not come on if the previous owner has had an on-off switch installed. If that’s the case, ask the previous owner or dealer to provide a copy of the letter from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) authorizing the switch and have airbag turned back on.

To protect yourself, consider getting a Carfax vehicle history report (www.carfax.com) or ask the dealer for one. It can indicate whether the vehicle has been involved in a crash, a clue that could help you uncover a missing or incorrect airbag system. Using this information and getting the vehicle inspected by a certified airbag mechanic *prior* to purchase will ensure a properly working airbag system and provide peace of mind. Here’s hoping that you have it, but never need it!—Andy