

BUYER BEWARE

Looking Out For Water-Damaged Used Cars

(NAPSA)—Approximately 600,000 cars were water damaged during 2005's hurricanes and tropical storms. It may surprise you to learn that many of these autos are now flooding the market—and a number of consumers are being taken for a ride.

Experts say that each year, unscrupulous auto sellers round up thousands of cars that have been "totaled" by floods and resell them to car buyers. Typically, flood-damaged cars show little, if any, sign of physical damage—making them prime targets for unscrupulous sellers to clean up and put back on the road. A few inexpensive cosmetic repairs, and these vehicles can be sold at significant profits. Fortunately, there are ways to keep from buying a waterlogged wreck:

- **Look For Damage**—Examine the trunk, glove compartment and beneath the seats and dash for mud, rust or water damage. Discolored, faded or stained carpet and upholstery can be a sign of flood damage as well. Be certain the carpeting fits well and matches the interior of the car. If it doesn't, it may be replacement carpet used to cover up water damage.

- **Get A Free Flood Check**—You can run a free check for flood damage at www.carfax.com/flood or NICB.org.

- **Check The Car's History**—Ask for a detailed vehicle history report before you buy. The reports can reveal hidden problems from a car's past, including whether it



Vehicle history reports can alert used-car buyers to whether a vehicle has been damaged by a flood.

was in a flood or whether a car was registered/titled in at-risk areas during floods or hurricane seasons. If the seller does not have a report, you can get the car's Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and run one yourself at a Web site such as www.carfax.com. The site searches a database of 4.5 billion vehicle records to provide detailed history reports on virtually every car or light truck registered since 1981.

- **Test It Out**—Test the lights, windshield wipers, radio, cigarette lighter and other electronic features to be certain they work. Also, check that all the gauges work. These items are often the first things damaged by floods.

- **Follow Your Nose**—Sit in the car and pay attention to its smell. Do you smell a musty odor or dampness? If so, flood damage may have occurred.

For more information or to run a vehicle history report, visit www.carfax.com.