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TxDMV puts brakes on title fraud, starts using national database to check title applications

Texans urged to “Don’t Buy a Wreck. Do a Title Check.”

AUSTIN - The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) is using a national title database system under the U.S. Department of Justice to help stop title fraud while urging consumers to learn how to protect themselves when buying a used vehicle.

“Too many Texans are being taken advantage of by people selling flooded, salvaged and rebuilt vehicles as though they were in perfect condition,” said TxDMV Executive Director Whitney Brewster.

Three years ago, the TxDMV revoked and placed legal restraints on hundreds of fraudulent Texas titles that were part of an organized crime “title washing” scam where salvage vehicles were sold, traded in, and exported as good vehicles with good titles. In another Texas incident, a group involved in two motor vehicle title service businesses was convicted of providing fraudulent titles. In at least one instance, a Texas law enforcement investigator linked a title fraud case to human trafficking.

“Starting today, everyone applying for a title in Texas will have the vehicle information run through the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS), a nationwide database that will allow us to access that vehicle’s title history,” Brewster said Monday.

The system produces a title history report that shows where and what states the vehicle was titled in, previous odometer readings and whether it has a brand that could impact the vehicle’s safety and/or value, such as salvage, junk, rebuilt or flooded.

It is the only vehicle title database in the nation to which all states, insurance carriers, junk and salvage yards are required by federal law to report. It contains title information on cars, trucks, motorcycles, motorhomes, buses and big rigs – virtually every titled motor vehicle in the country.

The best way to avoid becoming a victim of title fraud and finding out the used vehicle you purchased might be worth much less than what you paid or is unsafe to operate is by going to Title Check at www.TxDMV.gov.

“Don’t let us find a problem after you bought the vehicle,” Brewster cautioned. “The time to protect yourself is to check the vehicle in the national database *before* you buy.”

Here's what you do:

- ★ Get the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) off the vehicle you want to buy.
- ★ Go to Title Check at www.TxDMV.gov.
- ★ Have your credit card available.
- ★ Select one of the private companies designated as an approved provider by the Department of Justice. Prices begin at only a few dollars.
- ★ Follow the steps to obtain the report.

If you are currently driving a used vehicle, the TxDMV recommends using the national motor vehicle database now to find out if it has any title issues.

"When title fraud happens innocent people are hurt," Brewster said. "While we don't know how many, during this transition to automatic title checks by our agency, we are unfortunately going to find people who unknowingly bought or are driving a vehicle with a serious title problem."

The TxDMV website's Title Check information explains title brands and available options for those who find themselves with a title issue. The agency will send letters to title applicants when the national motor vehicle title database indicates a title issue.

The TxDMV recently launched a public education initiative, reminding Texans to "Don't Buy a *Wreck*. Do a Title Check." The agency is running radio public service announcements in major Texas markets, and distributing Title Check brochures and informational cards, which are available at county tax offices statewide. Texans can view a short video explaining the importance of Title Check on the homepage of the TxDMV website.

"We need everyone to urge their family members, neighbors, friends and co-workers to go to Title Check on the TxDMV website before they buy a used vehicle," Brewster said. "You will be helping to protect your fellow Texans and putting the brakes on title fraud in the Lone Star State."

"Remember," she added. "Don't Buy a *Wreck*. Do a Title Check."

For more information:

- ★ Title Check, www.TxDMV.gov
- ★ National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, www.vehiclehistory.gov

