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KDOR warns of danger from buying flooded vehicles

TOPEKA—Revenue Secretary Sam Williams on Thursday warned Kansans of the potential of thousands of formerly water-logged vehicles entering the private seller market after hurricanes flooded parts of the southern United States in recent weeks.

Vehicles that have sustained severe water damage may have life-threatening defects that are not visible to potential buyers. Consumers who purchase cars from dealerships should be protected, because licensed dealers are required to disclose all defects and salvage brands during a sale. But private sales are not required to disclose vehicle history, which puts consumers at risk.

“Buyers should beware of vehicles that are advertised well below what the car is worth, or if the seller produces an inspection report or evidence of a good title that predates the recent hurricanes,” Revenue Secretary Williams said. “It’s also risky to pay money before you see the vehicle in person or have it physically inspected first, especially if it’s from a state that was affected by flooding.”

Defects caused by water damage often don’t appear until 6 to 12 months after the incident, when the vehicle’s electrical system has degraded. Malfunctions such as failure of airbag sensors and other computer driven systems may present significant safety issues.

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KDOR's Division of Vehicles encourages prospective buyers to conduct a vehicle history check if it was from one of the flood affected states. Additionally, an independent inspection of the vehicle by a trusted mechanic is advisable. Buyers should also take extra pre-cautions to identify and brand flood-damaged vehicles by using services like NICB's VINcheck, or other services available are through Carfax or Autocheck. It's also important to note that updates to vehicle histories are not instantaneous, sometimes taking 30 to 60 days to be fully updated.

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