



Bruce Elfant, Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar

# News Release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# The flood isn't over: Don't let Harvey take you for a ride, use Title Check before buying a used car or truck

AUSTIN - Travis County residents in the market for a used vehicle need to stop Harvey from taking them for a ride by using a national database before making a purchase.

According to a recent Wired.com story, the flooding from Harvey may have destroyed as many as 1 million cars and trucks, many of them on the lots of car dealerships. Those wanting to buy a used vehicle need to protect themselves from unknowingly purchasing one of these vehicles, warns Tax Assessor-Collector Bruce Elfant.

“Crooks love floods because with very little effort they can clean these vehicles up to look sharp on the outside while the engines rot on the inside and pass them off to unsuspecting car buyers,” Elfant explains. “It is so easy to avoid buying one of these destroyed vehicles by using Title Check at [TxDMV.gov](http://TxDMV.gov).”

Title Check is part of the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS), a nationwide database that will show a vehicle's title history, including whether the vehicle was flooded, salvaged, junked or rebuilt. Federal law requires states, insurance companies, junk and salvage yards to report any findings that brand these vehicles to the database. The database contains title information on cars, trucks, motorcycles, motorhomes, buses and big rigs – virtually every titled motor vehicle in the country.

There is a small fee for using the database. Here is what you do:

- Get the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) off the vehicle you want to buy.
- Go to Title Check at Texas Department of Motor Vehicles website, [www.TxDmv.gov](http://www.TxDmv.gov).
- Have your credit card available.
- Select one of the private companies designated as an approved provider by the U.S. Department of Justice. Prices begin at only a few dollars.
- Follow the steps to obtain the report.

Whether buying a vehicle from a local dealer, individual or eyeing one from an online auction website, the title history report will let you know what you are buying before you pay any money or sign any

paperwork for the vehicle. Today, many dealerships use Title Check and will show customers the report upon request.

Elfant reminds would-be used car buyers that after hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, vehicles branded flooded or unrepairable by insurance companies were sold in Texas.

Unsuspecting buyers are duped by sellers who show them what looks like a clean title or make verbal promises the vehicle has a clean title. When the buyers go to title the vehicle at the county tax office, they may find the vehicle cannot be titled because it was branded inoperable or unrepairable in the national database.

Tax Office employees are required to run the vehicle's information through the database before they can process the title paperwork. Unfortunately, because the customer failed to do a Title Check before buying the vehicle, tax office staff often find themselves having to deliver difficult news to their customers.

"If we find out a vehicle was branded so that it cannot be legally operated then we have to tell our customer it cannot be titled for road use," Elfant says. "If the vehicle carries a brand, such as flooded or salvaged, we have to deliver the bad news the title will have this brand on it, reducing the vehicle's value by thousands of dollars.

"People are hurt, they lose their investment or they buy a vehicle that falls apart on them just because they didn't spend a few bucks to run the VIN through the national database before they bought the vehicle," Elfant adds. "Now, with Hurricane Harvey flooding so many vehicles, I cannot urge you enough to please run the VIN through the Title Check database before you buy a used vehicle."

The title history report will not tell you about vehicle repairs, accidents or maintenance. That information is available from one of the private companies that offer vehicle history reports.