

Flood Damaged Vehicles

Due to recent flooding associated with hurricanes, severe storms and heavy rains, hundreds of thousands of vehicles sustained serious water damage in Canada and the USA. Such water damage can make a vehicle unsafe to drive.

Canadian jurisdictions may experience a surge in these vehicles entering the resale market. Consumers and autobody technicians should be alerted that flood damaged vehicles pose health and safety risks and are not licensable for the road.

Why a flood damaged vehicle is unsafe, and therefore cannot be licensed for the road

A vehicle that experiences flooding can sustain severe water damage that makes the vehicle unsafe to operate. This applies to motorcycles and recreational vehicles as well.

A flood vehicle is defined as a vehicle that has been immersed in a liquid to the bottom of the dashboard or to a level affecting any of the major electrical system components, and/or a vehicle is contaminated with toxic fluid that renders the vehicle unsafe due to toxic hazard.

The bottom of the dashboard is the area where the floor meets the firewall at the seam. Thus, major electrical components can be compromised such as:

- A fuse panel or breaker panel.
- A component that monitors, triggers, or controls any module of the vehicle's occupant restraint systems.
- Vital safety systems including air bags may fail to function properly in the event of a collision.
- An electronic component that transmits or relays power for use in the heating and cooling of the vehicle occupant compartment.
- An electronic component that transmits or relays power for use in the vehicle's defogging or defrosting systems.
- An electronic component or module that controls the vehicle's primary operating systems.
- A main wiring harness with unsealed connections that is located in the occupant compartment.
- An electronic module that controls the vehicle's on-board self-diagnostic system.
- An electrical module that controls the vehicle's braking, acceleration, stability steering or any other systems affecting the drivability or safe operations of the vehicle.

Key areas affected by flooding are the fuse panel and breaker system, occupant restraint systems, seating and cooling systems, defogging or defrosting systems, vehicle operating systems, self-diagnostics, braking, accelerations and steering and the drivability or safe operations of the vehicle. Occupants of flood-damaged vehicles may develop health problems caused by the growth of mold and bacteria in the vehicle's absorbent materials, (fabric, foam, etc.), particularly if those occupants have existing respiratory conditions or are

immunocompromised. Moreover, some floodwaters can contain numerous toxins that include sewage, E-coli, petrochemicals, human and animal remains, arsenic and lead.

Corrosion in flood damaged vehicles often takes time to become bad enough that connections are lost or short circuits emerge, so a car that seems otherwise undamaged may break down at a most inopportune time, potentially resulting in a serious crash. Consumer Reports has suggested tips for identifying cars that may have spent time underwater. A buyer or mechanic should look for these telltale signs:

- Caked-on mud and a musty odor from the carpets. New carpets in an older vehicle may be another red flag.
- A visible water line on the lens or reflector of the headlights.
- Mud or debris trapped in difficult-to-clean places, such as gaps between panels in the trunk and under the hood.
- Rusty exposed screws under the dashboard. Unpainted metal in flood cars will show signs of rust.
- Rubber drain plugs under the car and on the bottom of doors that have been removed. That may have been done to drain floodwater.

Components of a flood damaged vehicle should never be used as donor parts for repairing or rebuilding other vehicles, except where it can be determined that the donor part was unaffected by the flooding occurrence.

It is important to note that flood damage to a vehicle can void the manufacturer's warranty.

Flood or water-damaged vehicles coming from the U.S. are considered junk/non-repairable by all licensing jurisdictions in Canada and can only be imported into Canada for scrap or parts via the Registrar of Imported Vehicles (RIV) parts program by using a Vehicle Imported for Parts Form (Form-3). For questions regarding registration of imported vehicles from abroad, other Canadian jurisdictions, or specific concerns related to flood damaged vehicles, consumers are advised to check with their province or territory's Registrar of Motor Vehicles.

#

The Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA)

The Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA) is an incorporated non-profit organization in Canada that coordinates all matters dealing with the administration, regulation and control of motor vehicle transportation and highway safety. Membership includes representation from provincial and territorial governments as well as the federal government of Canada. www.ccmta.ca