

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Consumers get another tool to investigate flood damaged vehicles

Insurance industry estimates of Hurricane Katrina and Rita-damaged vehicles range from 200,000 to 700,000. Documenting vehicle damage of this scope is a monumental undertaking and to assist with this, the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB), a non-profit insurance organization has launched a free online database for the public at www.nicb.org.

(COUNTY NAME) County Tax Assessor-Collector's office and TxDOT want to warn consumers to actively investigate a vehicle before buying. The NICB database is a new research tool. It will potentially reveal if vehicle has or has not been "affected by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita." A "hit" is good reason to investigate further. It does not mean a salvage title has issued, or that the vehicle has actual flood damage; only that the VIN was collected for one of three reasons:

- An insurance claim has been initiated
- A NICB inspector has looked at the vehicle
- The vehicle is in a "holding" area or storage facility for towed cars

"The number of damaged vehicles is historic, as is the potential for fraud," said (NAME), tax assessor-collector for (COUNTY NAME) County. "Fortunately, information is being gathered quickly using the latest technology by the insurance industry and law enforcement. Public and private groups are cooperating in a united response to prevent future fraud."

Several for-profit online vehicle information sites are also offering free VIN searches to the public. Because it may be months before hundreds of thousands of vehicle titles will be issued reflecting salvage or flood brands, consumers are reminded of the adage "Buyer Beware." While database research is a valuable tool, a physical examination is still the best way to avoid buying a flood damaged vehicle. Key signs of water damage are listed on the TxDOT Web site at www.dot.state.tx.us/vtr/flood/flddamg.htm

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For more information, call (COUNTY CONTACT PERSON'S NAME), (CONTACT PERSON'S TITLE), at (CONTACT PERSON'S PHONE NUMBER).