

Database to track damaged cars

The Associated Press
September 21, 2005

A new, expanded database to track vehicles flooded by Hurricane Katrina has been set up to prevent them from turning up on used car lots around the country.

While the National Insurance Crime Bureau has tried to track flooded vehicles from previous storms, the Katrina database represents the group's most ambitious flooded vehicle effort yet.

"Our concern is that vehicles that were affected by the storm will be turned around and resold to unsuspecting consumers if they're not cataloged properly," said Lt. Allen Carpenter, supervisor of the Louisiana State Police insurance fraud unit.

Each time an insurance company takes a flood claim for a car, it will pass on the vehicle identification number to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, which is building a database of flooded cars. That database will then be distributed to public officials in Louisiana, insurance companies and departments of motor vehicles across the country.

"We're keeping a running log on every vehicle that we can locate," said Dennie Huggins, vice president of field operations for the insurance crime bureau, which has set up an office in Baton Rouge. "We have thousands of VIN numbers already in it."

Loretta Worters, vice president of the Insurance Information Institute, a trade association also sponsored by the property casualty industry, said insurance companies total a car when the cost to fix the car exceeds its value.

If a car's electrical system is gone, it's generally totaled, Worters said. If only the brake pedals or carpeting is wet, the insurance company may say the car can be fixed.

Information from: The Times-Picayune,