

Schuette: Michigan Residents Should Use Caution Making Charitable Donations, Buying Used Cars Post-Hurricane Florence

LANSING – Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette today warned Michigan residents to use caution in making charitable donations to Hurricane Florence recovery charities and when considering purchasing used cars in the days and weeks immediately following the storm hitting the eastern seaboard.

Schuette also encouraged those with family and friends in the disaster zone to review the [After Disaster Consumer Alert](#) for post-disaster information.

BUYING USED VEHICLES

Vehicles with flood damage can appear for sale on the internet or at car lots, without any mention or obvious signs of the damage. Unscrupulous sellers can quickly move cars, trucks and SUVs from flood zones, clean the outside surfaces of the vehicle and get them on the market before rust and corrosion sets in.

Water can damage vital parts of a car including airbag sensors, brakes, and electrical systems — and the damage may not show up right away. Weeks or months could pass before evidence of damage is known, putting the purchase past warranty and leaving a driver without a car.

“In Michigan we are lucky to not have to experience disaster caused by hurricanes and our thoughts are with those impacted,” said Schuette. “However, flood damaged vehicles could end up in our state, and while most auto retailers wouldn’t sell a water damaged vehicle, there are some vendors who would use this time to take advantage of the trust people have in those selling used vehicles.”

PROTECT YOURSELF BEFORE PURCHASING

Have the vehicle inspected by an independent, competent automotive technician who has no relation to the seller. Since water damage can be hard to spot, paying an expert mechanic for an inspection is a good idea.

[Check the vehicle history.](#) Get the VIN (vehicle identification number) and trace its history through the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System database for a small fee. The National Motor Vehicle Information System is administered by the U.S. Department of Justice. Some consumers also choose to trace vehicle history using commercially available reports such as Experian’s Auto Check or CarFax. A vehicle history should tell you if the car has been in a flood region or issued a flood or salvage title. Remember though, these databases do not always have up-to-date or complete information about a vehicle (which is why the independent inspection is critical). You can also read the Consumer Alert “[Beware of Buying a Flood-Damaged Vehicle](#)” for more information.

Be on the lookout for vehicles with tell-tale signs of being submerged in water. For example:

- Musty or "over-perfumed" smell or signs of mold or mildew;
- Water stains, mud or residue in the trunk, under the carpet, floor mats, gas and brake pedals, and in hard-to-reach places difficult to clean;
- Title or registration histories indicating the car was in a flood area;
- Car hesitates, runs rough, or shows signs of premature rust or corrosion in places where you wouldn't expect to see rust, such as the upper door hinges, trunk latches, and screws on the console.
- Always physically inspect the vehicle's paper title before you buy. Check to see if it has been branded as "flood," "junk," "salvage," "rebuilt" or another brand indicating the vehicle was severely damaged. But beware; a clean title does not prove the car is undamaged. The title may have been 'laundered' across state lines or altered to conceal the brand.

FILE A MOTOR VEHICLE COMPLAINT

Consumers should file complaints against a used motor vehicle dealer with the [Secretary of State, Bureau of Information Security, Regulatory Monitoring Division](#) online or by contacting the Bureau of Information Security, Regulatory Monitoring Division at 888-SOS-MICH (888-767-6424).

DONATING TO HURRICANE RECOVERY CHARITIES

Many Michigan residents will consider donating to charities in the wake of the hurricane. The Attorney General's office advises consumers to do research before donating and be aware of the organizations they are giving to.

Before you donate, ask the following questions:

- To whom are you donating? Are you sure of the asker's identity? Could it be someone masquerading as someone else?
- How do you know that the money you donate will be spent appropriately? Public charities are subject to auditing requirements and other disclosure rules; you can also research them at various sites, including [AGCharitySearch](#).
- Is your intended recipient similarly transparent and accountable?
- If donating to an individual: Is it someone that you know? Someone that you trust? Is the amount being raised reasonable or does it seem excessive? When giving to an individual, it can be difficult to know for sure that the recipient will use your donation as you intend it to be used.

Use your best judgment; if in doubt, don't donate.

CHARITABLE SOLICITATIONS RESOURCES

Complaints regarding charitable solicitations may be filed through the Attorney General's online complaint form, or by mailing the Charitable Trust Section at P.O. Box 30214, Lansing, MI 48909-7714, or by emailing the Charitable Trust Section.

To assist individuals in making wise decisions regarding which charitable donations to support, Attorney General Schuette established an online searchable database for charities. The Attorney General also publishes an annual professional fundraising charitable solicitation report, available on the Attorney General website. The Attorney General's Charitable Trust Section is also available at 517-373-1152 to answer inquiries about a charity.

Consumers may contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at:

CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION

P.O. Box 30213
Lansing, MI 48909
517-373-1140
Fax: 517-241-3771
Toll free: 877-765-8388
[Online complaint form](#)