



AIR BAG THEFT AND FRAUD: DEFLATING A GROWING CRIME TREND

The Facts

Air bags have become targets for thieves who steal them and resell them on the black market or on Internet websites. A new air bag, which retails for approximately \$1,000 or more from a legitimate dealer or auto repair shop, costs between \$50-\$200 on the black market.

Recently, counterfeit air bags have also surfaced across the country after being sold to repair shops over the Internet. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has warned that some of these air bags do not deploy in a crash, or may explode into flames and throw out plastic or metal shrapnel when they inflate. [NHTSA Alert](#)

The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) suggests the following prevention tips to help avoid air bag fraud and theft.

- If your air bag has been stolen or has been deployed in an accident, contact your insurance company first.
- When replacing or repairing the air bag, use a reputable automobile collision repair shop that employs ASE-certified mechanics.
- Inspect the invoice to ensure the repair shop purchased the air bag from an auto manufacturer, dealer or certified recycler.
- If possible, inspect the air bag prior to installation. If new, it should be packaged in a sealed container from the manufacturer.
- The trim cover over the steering column should be the same color as the remaining trim interior. If not, it is an indication that the original air bag has been replaced.
- When you turn on your vehicle's ignition, a red SRS (Supplemental Restraint System) indicator should light up and flash in the instrument panel display, indicating the air bag system is activated. No SRS light indicates a problem with the air bag system that could result in no air bag activation.
- If you purchase a used car, ask for a vehicle history report, which may provide important information if the car has been in an accident or had repairs made to the air bags.
- Avoid purchasing a used vehicle that has been in an accident if the owner cannot provide satisfactory evidence that the vehicle has been properly repaired and the air bags are fully functional.
- Have a certified mechanic inspect the car and the air bag system.

If you suspect insurance fraud or theft, speak up! Anyone with information concerning insurance fraud or vehicle theft can report it anonymously by calling toll-free 800.TEL.NICB (800.835.6422), texting keyword "fraud" to TIP411 (847411) or submitting a form on our website. Or, download the NICB Fraud Tips app on your iPhone or Android device.