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Companies Discuss Reaction to Hurricane-Damaged Units

By Jennifer Reed, AR Today Editor

TITUSVILLE, Pa. (Nov. 4, 2005) -- As the National Insurance Crime Bureau's hurricane-damaged database climbs to more than 165,000 units, companies such as Salvage Direct and DriveTime discuss their response to the situation.

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As for Salvage Direct, the company said it is still in the midst of dealing with the aftermath of the Gulf Coast hurricanes. While the company is not new to the issues caused by hurricanes, it said the severity of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, along with the impact of Wilma, has tested the limits of its catastrophic teams.

"Because of the massive destruction and overwhelming devastation, we knew we had to bring our own basic services just to set up shop," explained Salvage Direct's President and Chief Operating Officer Darren Horn. "The flood conditions made it take much longer than usual to recover and assess damaged vehicles and watercraft. Of course, witnessing the reactions of returning evacuees required a certain amount of sensitivity to their material losses."

Salvage Direct worked closely with insurance company adjusters to discover and catalogue salvaged vehicles and watercraft and relocate them to a nearby 23-acre steel mill site within a 10-day period.

Salvage cars and trucks, including specialty lines such as RVs, ATVs, jet skis, boats and motorcycles, were set up with individual online auctions for resale or dismantling to Salvage Direct's network of certified independent vendors. The company said it has already closed auctions on half of the 2,000 hurricane-related items.

"We're still finding automobiles, boats, recreation vehicles and other items in New Orleans from Hurricane Katrina," said Horn. "In fact, the first week we found a boat in the water. That may sound OK, unfortunately it was in someone's pool after sailing through a second-floor condo. I'm really proud of my crews and their continued hard work in the face of all the devastation. But, I do think they're tired of taking quick showers with bottled water."

Meanwhile, DriveTime is sending out assurances that the company will

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not retail hurricane-damaged units through its stores. The company believes some damaged and dangerous cars may emerge from the storm-swept areas over the next few months and is warning consumers to be cautious.

"We never buy cars with signs of flood damage," said Colin Bachinsky, director of inventory for DriveTime. "DriveTime has a rigorous 53-point inspection process and regularly returns 10 percent or more of cars to auction when they fail inspection. Our fleet managers and inspection personnel are trained to recognize the warning signs of a flood-damaged car and we want to pass that 'know how' along.

DriveTime's warnings signs of a hurricane-damaged vehicle include:

- Mud caked in the fender walls
- Wet or damp floors or mildew smell in the trunk
- Wet or mildew smelling carpets
- Mud behind the footwell kick panels
- Multiple electrical problems, which are an indication of water damage and could cause multiple short circuits

As the potential exists that the car has already been cleaned, DriveTime said less obvious signs include:

- Rusty metal on the dashboard, in the undercarriage or under the hood
- Poorly wrapped electrical wiring and/or wiring rewrapped with plain electrical tape are signs of circuit repairs
- Unusual traces of sand/silt under the hood or in unusual places

"DriveTime encourages all used car buyers to take a proactive approach," said Bachinsky. "Customers should always ask questions, look under the hood, check the electrical work and take a test drive -- all could help identify the safety and reliability of any used car."

