

## Group: Counterfeit airbags threaten motorists' lives

By: Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise

Counterfeit airbags threaten the lives of innocent motorists driving without this vital safety feature to protect them during an accident, the **Coalition Against Insurance Fraud** warns.

The Coalition website says it is the nation's only anti-fraud watchdog that speaks for consumers, insurance companies, legislators, regulators and others.

Tens of thousands of vehicles on the road might have fake airbags made by black marketeers over the last three years, the Obama administration said this week, according to a Coalition news release. The fakes are inexpensive, realistic-looking knockoffs made overseas.

(U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director John Morton, right, speaks about airbags during a news conference at the Transportation Department in Washington, DC, on Wednesday, Oct. 10. Associated Press photo.)

The bags may not deploy during a crash, leaving drivers and passengers vulnerable. People have died and been seriously injured in crashes without proper airbags in prior years. In one recent federal test, a counterfeit airbag shot fire and metal shards at a crash dummy.

Fakes tend to be replacements that body shops install after legitimate bags deployed during a crash.

Counterfeiters sell cheap, knockoff bags to unsuspecting body shops for large markups.

Dishonest body shops also knowingly buy them. The shops then charge insurance companies hundreds of dollars to replace a deployed bag with a cheap counterfeit bag made on the black market.

Body shops also have stuffed sneakers, beer cans and other junk into the compartments, which are sealed with covers that mimic authentic manufacturer's equipment.

Inspecting and replacing airbags could cost a driver thousands of dollars if multiple airbags need replacing. Visit [www.safercar.gov](http://www.safercar.gov) for to help see if your vehicle has counterfeit bags.

These tips will help consumers avoid fake airbags:

**Qualified mechanic.** Have a qualified mechanic check the airbags and replace bogus ones. This is especially true for drivers buying used or salvaged vehicles. But drivers shouldn't remove the airbag covers themselves, the Coalition warns. Removal could trigger a dangerous explosion and damage an expensive airbag system.

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**Coalition Against  
Insurance Fraud**

**Airbag light.** Check out the airbag indicator light after repairs or when test-driving a vehicle. The light should appear briefly, and then turn off. The airbag system may be faulty if the light remains on, flashes or never turns on.

**Vehicle report.** Order a vehicle history report from a commercial service when considering buying a used vehicle. This can reveal if the vehicle was salvaged or damaged in a crash.

**Complaint history.** See if the body shop has a history of complaints – before having repairs done. Check the shop's complaint history with the Better Business Bureau.