# WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §17A-4-10

**§17A-4-10. Salvage certificates for certain wrecked or damaged vehicles; fee; penalty.**

(a) In the event a motor vehicle is determined to be a total loss or otherwise designated as totaled by an insurance company or insurer, and upon payment of a total loss claim to an insured or claimant owner for the purchase of the vehicle, the insurance company or the insurer, as a condition of the payment, shall require the owner to surrender the certificate of title: *Provided*, That an insured or claimant owner may choose to retain physical possession and ownership of a total loss vehicle. If the vehicle owner chooses to retain the vehicle and the vehicle has not been determined to be a cosmetic total loss in accordance with subsection (d) of this section, the insurance company or insurer shall also require the owner to surrender the vehicle registration certificate. The term "total loss" means a motor vehicle which has sustained damages equivalent to seventy-five percent or more of the market value as determined by a nationally accepted used car value guide or meets the definition of a flood-damaged vehicle as defined in this section.

(b) The insurance company or insurer shall, prior to the payment of the total loss claim, determine if the vehicle is repairable, cosmetically damaged, or nonrepairable. Except as provided in subsection (p) of this section, within 10 days of payment of the total loss claim, the insurance company or insurer shall surrender the certificate of title, a copy of the claim settlement, a completed application on a form prescribed by the commissioner, and the registration certificate if the owner has chosen to keep the vehicle to the Division of Motor Vehicles.

(c) If the insurance company or insurer determines that the vehicle is repairable, the division shall issue a salvage certificate, on a form prescribed by the commissioner, in the name of the insurance company, the insurer, or the vehicle owner if the owner has chosen to retain the vehicle. The certificate shall contain, on the reverse, spaces for one successive assignment before a new certificate at an additional fee is required. Upon the sale of the vehicle, the insurance company, insurer, or vehicle owner if the owner has chosen to retain the vehicle, shall complete the assignment of ownership on the salvage certificate and deliver it to the purchaser. The vehicle may not be titled or registered for operation on the streets or highways of this state unless there is compliance with subsection (h) of this section. The division shall charge a fee of $22.50 for each salvage title issued. The Division of Motor Vehicles may adjust the fee for each salvage title every five years on September 1, based on the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics most current Consumer Price Index: *Provided*, That an increase in such fee may not exceed 10 percent of the total fee amount in a single year.

(d) If the insurance company or insurer determines the damage to a totaled vehicle is exclusively cosmetic and no repair is necessary in order to legally and safely operate the motor vehicle on the roads and highways of this state, the insurance company or insurer

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shall, upon payment of the claim, submit the certificate of title to the division. Neither the insurance company nor the division may require the vehicle owner to surrender the registration certificate in the event of a cosmetic total loss settlement.

(1) The division shall, without further inspection, issue a title branded "cosmetic total loss" to the insured or claimant owner if the insured or claimant owner wishes to retain possession of the vehicle, in lieu of a salvage certificate. The division shall charge a fee of $22.50 for each cosmetic total loss title issued. The terms "cosmetically damaged" and "cosmetic total loss" do not include any vehicle which has been damaged by flood or fire. The designation "cosmetic total loss" on a title may not be removed. The Division of Motor Vehicles may adjust the fee for each cosmetic total loss title every five years on September 1, based on the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics most current Consumer Price Index: *Provided*, That an increase in such fee may not exceed ten percent of the total fee amount in a single year.

(2) If the insured or claimant owner elects not to take possession of the vehicle and the insurance company or insurer retains possession, the division shall issue a cosmetic total loss salvage certificate to the insurance company or insurer. The division shall charge a fee of $22.50 for each cosmetic total loss salvage certificate issued. The Division of Motor Vehicles may adjust the fee for each cosmetic total loss salvage certificate every five years on September 1, based on the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics most current Consumer Price Index: *Provided*, That an increase in such fee may not exceed ten percent of the total fee amount in a single year. The division shall, upon surrender of the cosmetic total loss salvage certificate issued under the provisions of this paragraph and payment of the five percent motor vehicle sales tax on the fair market value of the vehicle as determined by the commissioner, issue a title branded "cosmetic total loss" without further inspection.

(e) If the insurance company or insurer determines that the damage to a totaled vehicle renders it nonrepairable, incapable of safe operation for use on roads and highways, and as having no resale value except as a source of parts or scrap, the insurance company or vehicle owner shall, in the manner prescribed by the commissioner, request that the division issue a nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate in lieu of a salvage certificate. The division shall issue a nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate without charge.

(f) Any owner who scraps, compresses, dismantles, or destroys a vehicle without further transfer or sale for which a certificate of title, nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate, or salvage certificate has been issued shall, within 45 days, surrender the certificate of title, nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate, or salvage certificate to the division for cancellation.

(g) Any person who purchases or acquires a vehicle as salvage or scrap, to be dismantled, compressed, or destroyed, shall, within 45 days, surrender to the division the certificate of title, nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate, salvage certificate, or a statement of cancellation signed by the seller, on a form prescribed by the commissioner. Subsequent purchasers of salvage or scrap are not required to comply with the notification requirement.

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(h) If the motor vehicle is a "reconstructed vehicle" as defined in this section or §17A-1-1 of this code, it may not be titled or registered for operation until it has been inspected by an official state inspection station and by the Division of Motor Vehicles. Following an approved inspection, an application for a new certificate of title may be submitted to the division. The applicant is required to retain all receipts for component parts, equipment, and materials used in the reconstruction. The salvage certificate shall also be surrendered to the division before a certificate of title may be issued with the appropriate brand.

(i) The owner or title holder of a motor vehicle titled in this state which has previously been branded in this state or another state as salvage, reconstructed, cosmetic total loss, cosmetic total loss salvage, flood, fire, an equivalent term under another state's laws, or a term consistent with the intent of the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System established pursuant to 49 U. S. C. § 30502 shall, upon becoming aware of the brand, apply for and receive a title from the Division of Motor Vehicles on which the brand "reconstructed", "salvage", "cosmetic total loss", "cosmetic total loss salvage", "flood", "fire", or other brand is shown. The division shall charge a fee of $10 for each title so issued. The Division of Motor Vehicles may adjust the fee for each reconstructed, salvage, cosmetic total loss, cosmetic total loss salvage, flood, fire, or other brand title issued every five years on September 1, based on the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics most current Consumer Price Index: *Provided*, That an increase in such fee may not exceed 10 percent of the total fee amount in a single year.

(j) If application is made for title to a motor vehicle, the title to which has previously been branded reconstructed, salvage, cosmetic total loss, cosmetic total loss salvage, flood, fire, or other brand by the Division of Motor Vehicles under this section and said application is accompanied by a title from another state which does not carry the brand, the division shall, before issuing the title, affix the brand "reconstructed", "cosmetic total loss", "cosmetic total loss salvage", "flood", "fire", or other brand to the title. The motor vehicle sales tax paid on a motor vehicle titled as reconstructed, cosmetic total loss, flood, fire, or other brand under the provisions of this section shall be based on 50 percent of the fair market value of the vehicle as determined by a nationally accepted used car value guide to be used by the commissioner.

(k) The division shall charge a fee of $22.50 for the issuance of each salvage certificate or cosmetic total loss salvage certificate but shall not require the payment of the five percent motor vehicle sales tax. The Division of Motor Vehicles may adjust the fee for each salvage certificate or cosmetic total loss salvage certificate every five years on September 1, based on the U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics most current Consumer Price Index: *Provided*, That an increase in such fee may not exceed ten percent of the total fee amount in a single year. However, upon application for a certificate of title for a reconstructed, cosmetic total loss, flood or fire damaged vehicle, or other brand, the division shall collect the five percent privilege tax on the fair market value of the vehicle as determined by the commissioner unless the applicant is otherwise exempt from the payment of such privilege tax. A wrecker/dismantler/rebuilder, licensed by the division, is exempt from the payment of the five percent privilege tax upon titling a reconstructed vehicle. The

division shall collect a fee of $35 per vehicle for inspections of reconstructed vehicles. These fees shall be deposited in a special fund created in the State Treasurer's office and may be expended by the division to carry out the provisions of this article: *Provided*, That on and after July 1, 2007, any balance in the special fund and all fees collected pursuant to this section shall be deposited in the State Road Fund. Licensed wreckers/dismantlers/rebuilders may charge a fee not to exceed $25 for all vehicles owned by private rebuilders which are inspected at the place of business of a wrecker/dismantler/rebuilder.

(l) As used in this section:

(1) "Reconstructed vehicle" means the vehicle was totaled under the provisions of this section or by the provisions of another state or jurisdiction and has been rebuilt in accordance with the provisions of this section or in accordance with the provisions of another state or jurisdiction or meets the provisions of §17A-1-1(n) of this code.

(2) "Flood-damaged vehicle" means that the vehicle was submerged in water to the extent that water entered the passenger or trunk compartment.

(3) "Other brand" means a brand consistent with the intent of the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System established pursuant to 49 U. S. C. § 30502 and rules promulgated by the United States Department of Justice to alert consumers, motor vehicle dealers or the insurance industry of the history of a vehicle.

(m) Every vehicle owner shall comply with the branding requirements for a totaled vehicle whether or not the owner receives an insurance claim settlement for a totaled vehicle.

(n) A certificate of title issued by the division for a reconstructed vehicle shall contain markings in bold print on the face of the title that it is for a reconstructed, flood, or fire-damaged vehicle.

(o) Any person who knowingly provides false or fraudulent information to the division that is required by this section in an application for a title, a cosmetic total loss title, a reconstructed vehicle title, or a salvage certificate, or who knowingly fails to disclose to the division information required by this section to be included in the application, or who otherwise violates the provisions of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, shall for each incident be fined not less than $1,000 nor more than $2,500, or imprisoned in jail for not more than one year, or both fined and imprisoned.

(p) Notwithstanding any other provision of law and with respect to a vehicle which the vehicle owner has not chosen to retain, if an insurance company or insurer is unable to obtain the properly endorsed certificate of title for a motor vehicle within 15 days of the payment of a total loss claim, the insurance company or insurer, at any time thereafter, may apply to the Division of Motor Vehicles for a salvage certificate, a cosmetic total loss salvage certificate, or a nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate, as applicable. The application shall be accompanied by evidence that the insurance company or insurer has paid a total loss

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claim on the vehicle, a copy of a written request for the certificate of title sent to the vehicle owner and any known lienholder by the insurance company or insurer or a designee of the insurance company or insurer, proof that the request was sent by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the last known address of the vehicle owner and any known lienholder, service to be complete upon the mailing thereof, and the required fee, if applicable. Upon receipt of a properly completed application, the division shall issue a salvage certificate, a cosmetic total loss salvage certificate or a nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate, as applicable, in the name of the insurance company or insurer. Such salvage certificate, cosmetic total loss salvage certificate, or nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate shall be issued free and clear of all liens and claims of ownership.

(q) If an insurance company or insurer requests that an automobile auction take possession of a motor vehicle that is the subject of an insurance claim, and subsequently the insurance company denies coverage with respect to the motor vehicle or otherwise does not take ownership of the motor vehicle, the automobile auction may proceed as follows. At any time after the automobile auction has had possession of the motor vehicle for 45 days, it may apply to the division for a salvage certificate or a nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate without surrendering the certificate of title for the motor vehicle. The application shall be accompanied by a copy of a written request, on the automobile auction's letterhead, requesting that, upon payment of applicable charges, the vehicle be removed from the automobile auction's facility, proof that the request was delivered by a nationally-recognized courier service or by certified mail to the vehicle owner and any known lienholder at least 15 days before the date of the application, and the required fee, if applicable. Upon receipt of a properly completed application, the division shall issue a salvage certificate or a nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate, as applicable, in the name of the automobile auction. Such salvage certificate or nonrepairable motor vehicle certificate shall be issued free and clear of all liens and claims of ownership.

(r) An applicant pursuant to subsection (p) or (q) of this section shall indemnify and hold harmless the Division of Motor Vehicles from any liability arising from an error or misrepresentation made by such applicant in a submission to the division pursuant to subsection (p) or (q) of this section.

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