



Air Bags

History

Air bags were first introduced into American automobiles in the 1970s. Beginning with the 1999 models, driver and passenger side air bags have been standard equipment on all new passenger cars, sport utility vehicles, vans, and light trucks sold in this country. Because of safety and environmental issues disposing of air bag systems must be given consideration.

How can you tell if a vehicle is equipped with an air bag?

Look for the words "Supplemental Inflatable Restraint", "Air Bag", or initials such as "SIR", or "SRS" on the steering wheel hub for driver air bags and on the instrument panel (over the glove box) on the right side of the vehicle for passenger air bags.

Other ways to identify if air bags are present include the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), a label under the hood, in the glove box, or on or near the sun visor(s). Still not certain? Check with the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) for their list:

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
1005 North Glebe Rd.
Arlington, VA 22201
(703) 247-1500

Why should an air bag be deployed or removed before scrapping a vehicle?

Air bags--whether made of plastic, metal, or vinyl--contain a propellant called Sodium Azide (NaN_3), a hazardous substance, which is dangerous if inhaled and may burn exposed skin. Undeployed air bags can also damage vehicle shredders by releasing NaN_3 into the "fluff". Contaminated fluff could require costly handling and disposal methods. To prevent vehicle shredder damage or contamination, an undeployed air bag should be deployed or removed before scrapping a vehicle.

 **If a vehicle has reached your yard with the air bag already deployed it may be scrapped without any special precautions.**



Steps to remove and deploy air bags -- in vehicle:

Wear appropriate protective gear, including hearing, hand and eye protection.

1. Disconnect cables from the vehicle battery prior to attempting this procedure, wait at least 20 minutes for the air bag's internal battery to completely discharge. **Failure to disconnect the vehicle battery cables could result in accidental deployment and personal injury.**
2. Make a 2-wire 30 ft. or longer jumper harness for remote deploying.
3. Locate and disconnect the wires leading to the driver and passenger (if installed) air bag(s). These should be located at the base of the steering column and beneath the instrument panel on the passenger side.
4. Make sure the driver and passenger (if installed) air bag module is properly secured to the steering wheel.
5. Clear all loose items from the front seat and instrument panel areas.
6. Connect the end of the jumper wiring harness to the ends of the wires leading to the air bag module.
7. Standing at least 20 ft. from the module, deploy the air bag by touching the ends of the jumper wiring harness to the terminals of a 12 volt battery.
8. Leave the deployed air bag(s) in the vehicle if you are not going to recycle them.

Steps to remove and deploy air bags -- out of vehicle:

Wear appropriate protective gear, including hearing, hand and eye protection.

1. Follow steps 1 through 3 for in vehicle removal and deployment.
2. Remove the air bag module(s) from the vehicle and cut the wires at the furthest point from the module.
3. Position the air bag module on the ground with the trim cover openings facing straight up. Some propping of the air bag module may be required.
4. Separately connect the ends of the jumper wiring harness to the ends of the wires leading to the bag module.
5. Standing at least 20 ft. from the module, deploy the air bag by touching the ends of the jumper wiring harness to the terminals of a 12 volt battery.
6. Allow the module to cool before handling. Then process with your other recycled air bag modules. If the NaN_3 powder should contact your skin, wash with water.

For more information on air bag removal procedures contact:

American Automobile Manufacturers Association (AAMA)
1401 H Street, NW Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 326-5500

...or call the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Environmental Assistance Division at 1-800-974-9559. Information for this Fact Sheet provided by AAMA.