

## **Attorney Generals Office Reaches Deal With Whitneys Auto Group**

### **Local News**

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MONTESANO, Wash. - A Washington State Attorney General's Office investigation into Whitney's Auto Group concluded Wednesday with an agreement halting consumer-unfriendly sales and marketing tactics. "Buying a car is a big purchase — a big deal — for most of us," said Assistant Attorney General Mary Lobdell. "Consumers should feel confident that the process is honest and transparent. Today's agreement with Whitney's Auto Group and its affiliated dealerships is part of our ongoing work to make sure that consumers are treated fairly, whether they buy cars at dealerships or tent sales." Whitney's Auto Group sells vehicles at Aberdeen Honda, Whitney's Chevrolet in Montesano, Stormy's Used Cars, and Whitney's Value Ford, both in Elma. Whitney also sold vehicles at the now closed Interstate Auto Liquidators business in Kelso and Vancouver. The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division began investigating the companies in 2009 as a result of consumer complaints about a variety of consumer protection violations. One consumer complained that a routine oil change revealed the car she bought from Aberdeen Honda, via a Raymond, Washington tent sale, had a cracked frame. "That's something that should have been revealed in a safety inspection and communicated to the customer before she agreed to buy the car," said Lobdell.

Another consumer complained about a mailer from Aberdeen Honda offering two potential prizes — a Honda Civic and Freshwater Pearl necklace. The mailer stated that he had already won. However, the consumer later learned that his winning number had to match another number posted at the dealership. Lobdell points out that the practice runs afoul of the state's Promotional Advertising of Prizes Act, which requires that all material terms of a promotion be prominently included in the mailer. Wednesday's agreement comes in the form of a consent decree between the Attorney General's Office and Whitney Auto Group. Under the agreement filed in Grays Harbor Superior Court, the dealerships run by the auto group agreed, among other requirements, to:

- Disclose known facts about a vehicle's condition, including information about the mechanical or frame condition of the vehicle or the vehicle's warranty.
- Comply with the [Promotional Advertising of Prizes Act](#) by, for example, failing to disclose material restrictions in the immediate proximity and same page where the prize is listed.
- Stop deceptive advertising practices, including making statements that imply false savings to consumers, including offering a percentage off the manufacturer's suggested retail price for used vehicles.
- Not make any false, deceptive, or misleading statement to a lender for the purpose of obtaining a loan for a vehicle buyer.
- Sell vehicles at the advertised price.
- Disclose the price of the vehicle upon request.

A reporter from KOMO Television recently [revealed](#) that this practice occurred at a sale co-sponsored by Whitney Auto Group. The consent decree requires that, when they sell vehicles at an off-site location such as a tent sale, Whitney display prices for used vehicles on the inside or outside of the vehicle.