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TxDMV launches first paperless vehicle title system

AUSTIN – Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) officials announced at a press conference today that Texas is the first state in the country to begin a paperless vehicle title system.

The system known as webDEALER creates electronic vehicle titles, or eTitles, for Texans and turns stacks of paper into a simple Internet-based process for dealers.

“The TxDMV is protecting Texans and streamlining the business process for dealers and county tax offices statewide,” said TxDMV Executive Director Whitney Brewster during the press conference at Leif Johnson Ford.

eTitles will do for Texas vehicle owners what electronic recording of stocks and bonds did for investors – protect their investment.

“An eTitle eliminates the risk of someone stealing your paper title and reassigning ownership of your vehicle,” Brewster said. “You also do not have to worry about misplacing your title.”

Travis County and Leif Johnson Ford are the first to try webDEALER, which electronically transfers the buyer’s information and fees from the dealer to the county tax office.

“I think Texans will be pleased to learn that with webDEALER they will no longer have to fill out all those paper government forms,” said Luanne Caraway, a TxDMV board member and the Hays County tax assessor-collector. “This is what we do at the TxDMV: Get out of your way so you can go on your way.”

Some states capture electronic title information on the front end but continue to manually process paperwork in their offices. Texas’ webDEALER is totally automated, eliminating the paperwork for the counties and TxDMV. “Dealer representatives will no longer have to physically go down to their local tax offices to process titles,” Caraway said. “Instead they will submit customer information electronically to the county tax offices where the information is checked and released to TxDMV.”

Currently, there are more than 25 million titles in the state’s motor vehicle database. These represent existing paper titles.

“Not everyone in Texas is going to receive an eTitle overnight,” Brewster said. Texans with existing titles keep their paper ones.

Dealers using the webDEALER system will offer customers who purchase vehicles without liens the option of receiving a paper title or allowing the TxDMV to create an eTitle. Choosing the latter provides the greatest protection from lost or stolen titles.

The Travis County tax office processed the first webDEALER transaction from a customer at Leif Johnson Ford in September.

“It seems fitting that the first customer processed through webDEALER bought a pickup truck,” said Brewster, adding almost one in four vehicles in the state is a pickup truck.

Bruce Elfant, the Travis County tax assessor-collector, said he jumped at the chance for his county to be the first to select a new car dealer to use webDEALER. “Everybody wins with this system – consumers get title protection and dealers and counties get an efficient way to do business,” Elfant said. “I really have to hand it to the TxDMV for coming up with something that benefits regular vehicle owners, boosts state economic growth and saves county tax office resources.”

Stephanie Keski, the title manager at Leif Johnson, said the dealership appreciated being invited by Elfant to be the first to try out the system. “It’s exciting to think the first webDEALER transaction came from our dealership,” she said. “This is a great program and the TxDMV’s quick response team has already improved the system based on our suggestions.”

Brewster pointed out that for now select county tax offices are working with one dealership in their area so the TxDMV can continue to upgrade the system through real-world experience. Travis County kicked off the program with Leif Johnson; Williamson County selected Mac Haik Auto Group in Georgetown; El Paso County is working with Bravo Cadillac; and Hays County plans to begin working with Chuck Nash Chevrolet in San Marcos.

“We are just starting to roll out webDEALER for customers buying new vehicles from franchised dealers,” Brewster said. “From there, we will move on to used vehicle dealers, salvage dealers and private sales.”

The webDEALER system is voluntary and expected to be available to all new car dealers in the summer of 2014. Bill Wolters, president of the Texas Automobile Dealers Association, predicted new car and truck dealers in the association are ready to embrace the system. “It’s going to save time and money,” he added.

The TxDMV licenses more than 2,600 franchised dealers in Texas. These dealers process the title work on their vehicle sales through the state’s 254 county tax offices.

“My county is excited to help launch eTitles for Texans,” said Deborah Hunt, the Williamson County tax assessor-collector. “We all know given the sheer volume of titles in Texas it will take a while before everyone has an electronic title, but taxpayers should be pleased to know this program will give them a safe and secure way to protect their titles and dealers will benefit from a system that makes titling a vehicle quick and easy.”

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