



Looking Up a Car by VIN — Recalls, History & What's Covered

Open recalls, basic history and what's covered for free An Extended Guide · No. 1929

————— **An Extended Guide · No. 1929** —————

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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What's Inside

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1. The 60-Second Version If you only read one page, read this one. Every car, truck, and motorcycle wears a 17-character serial number called a VIN. The government runs a free website where you type that number in and instantly see whether the car has an open safety recall — a known defect the maker has promised to fix for free. That is the whole trick. You do not need an account, you do not pay a dime, and it works on a car you own or one you are thinking of buying. Find the VIN on the dash by the windshield or inside the driver's door. Go to [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls) and type in all 17 characters. If a recall shows up, call any dealer for that brand — the fix is free. A result of zero open recalls is good news, but it is not a full history report. WATCH OUT Do this at your kitchen table or in a parked car, never while driving. There is nothing here that cannot wait until you are stopped. THE BASICS 2. What a VIN Actually Is Think of it as the car's Social Security number. VIN stands for Vehicle Identification Number. It is a string of 17 letters and numbers that belongs to one specific vehicle and no other. No two cars share a VIN. The characters are not random — they spell out the country where the car was built, the maker, the model, the engine, the year, and the exact order it rolled off the line. You do not need to decode any of that yourself. What matters to you is that the VIN is the one key that unlocks everything official about that particular car, including whether it has a safety recall waiting. The important thing is that you do not have to understand the code to use it. I meet folks who worry they need to 'know what it means' before they type it in. You don't. The website and the app read the code for you. All you ever do is copy the 17 characters off the car and into the box, exactly as they appear. Treat it like a phone number: you don't need to know how the phone company routes the call, you just need to dial the right digits. Get the VIN right and everything else takes care of itself.

GOOD TO KNOW

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The VIN never uses the letters I, O, or Q. That is on purpose, so nobody confuses them with the numbers 1 and 0. If you think you see an O, it is a zero. FINDING IT 3. Where to Find Your VIN It is stamped in more places than you'd think. You do not have to hunt far. The easiest spot is the driver's-side dashboard: stand outside the car, look through the windshield at the bottom corner nearest the driver, and you will see a small metal plate with the number. The second-easiest is a sticker inside the driver's door — open the door and look at the frame where the latch catches. And because the VIN follows the car on paper, it is printed on your title, your registration, and your insurance card too. If you cannot find it on the car for some reason — maybe it is winter and the dash plate is iced over — your paperwork is just as good. The number printed on your registration or insurance card is the very same VIN, so you can run the check from your armchair with your insurance card in hand. That is often the easiest way of all. There is no difference between the number on the dash and the number on your card; a VIN is a VIN wherever you read it from. Driver's-side dashboard, seen through the windshield. Sticker on the driver's door jamb, visible when the door is open. The vehicle title (the ownership document). Your registration paperwork from the BMV. Your auto insurance card or policy. TIP Snap a photo of the VIN plate with your phone once and keep it. Then you can read it off the screen at the kitchen table instead of crouching by the car.

THE TOOL

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4. The One Free Official Tool This is the only website you need for recalls. The official, free, government tool lives at [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls). NHTSA is the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration — the federal agency that oversees car safety. This is the real thing, not a middleman, and it never asks for payment. When a company selling history reports tells you to pay to see recalls, remember that the recall check itself is always free at this one address. Bookmark it or write it on a sticky note by your computer. Everything in this guide starts here. I know a.gov address may look unfamiliar if you are used to the .com sites everyone advertises. That is exactly the point. The .gov ending is reserved for real United States government bodies, so when you see it you know you have reached the genuine article and not a copycat trying to charge you. If you ever land on a page that looks like the recall tool but has a different ending or asks for money, close it and start over. The real one is free and ends in .gov, every time. **WATCH OUT** Type the address carefully. Scammers set up look-alike websites with names that are one letter off, hoping you will pay or hand over personal details. The real one ends in .gov, which only genuine government sites can use. **STEP BY STEP 5. Running the Check** Four clicks and you have your answer. Here is the whole routine. It takes under a minute once you have the VIN in hand. The site is plain and quick, and it tells you the answer right on the screen without making you sign up for anything. If the site tells you the VIN is invalid, do not panic — it almost always means a typo. Go back and check each character slowly against the plate, paying special attention to the spots where a letter and a number look alike. Remember a VIN never contains the letters I, O, or Q, so if you typed one of those, it should be a 1 or a 0. Fix the stray character and search again. In all my years I have rarely seen the tool reject a VIN that was actually typed correctly.

TIP

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- 1 Open your web browser and go to [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls).
- 2 Find the box that says 'Enter a VIN' and click in it.
- 3 Carefully type all 17 characters, with no spaces.
- 4 Click the Search or magnifying-glass button.
- 5 Read the result: it either lists open recalls or says there are none. Type the VIN slowly and double-check it against the plate. One wrong character and the tool either refuses it or, worse, looks up a different car entirely. ANOTHER WAY 6. Looking Up by License Plate No VIN handy? The plate can work too. If you are standing in a used-car lot and cannot reach the dashboard plate, the NHTSA tool also lets you search by license plate and state. It quietly converts the plate to the VIN behind the scenes and shows you the same recall information. It is a handy backup, but the VIN is always the surer path, because plates get transferred between cars and occasionally bring up the wrong match. When you can, use the 17-character VIN. The plate search is a nice backup, but I steer people to the VIN whenever they can get it. License plates move from car to car over the years, and once in a while a plate lookup pulls up the wrong vehicle or an out-of-date record. The seventeen-character VIN belongs to one car and one car only, so it is always the surer path. Use the plate when you are stuck without the VIN, standing in a lot perhaps, and switch to the VIN the moment you can reach the dash or the paperwork. GOOD TO KNOW The plate lookup only works for cars registered in the United States, and only for the plate's current car. Once you own the vehicle, switch to checking by VIN.

WHAT IT IS

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7. What a Recall Really Means A recall is the maker admitting a safety problem. A safety recall happens when a carmaker or the government decides that something on a vehicle is dangerous enough that it must be fixed. It could be brakes, airbags, wiring that could catch fire, or steering that could fail. The law says the maker has to repair, replace, or refund the faulty part, and they have to do it for free. A recall is not a suggestion and it is not the same as normal wear. It is an official safety fix that the company owes you. It helps to understand that a recall is not a black mark against your car or a sign you bought a lemon. Even the finest, most expensive cars get recalls. With millions of parts across millions of vehicles, makers sometimes discover a flaw only after cars are on the road, and the recall system is how they make it right. So finding a recall is not bad news about your judgment — it is the safety system working exactly as it should, catching a problem and getting it fixed for you at no charge. Recalls cover safety defects, not ordinary aging or maintenance. The maker must fix them at no cost to you. There is no deadline that makes you lose the free fix on a safety recall. Recalls can be issued years after a car was built.

WHY IT MATTERS 8. Why Recalls Are a Big Deal One recall rewrote the rules for all of them. The reason I nag people about recalls is the Takata airbag mess. Takata made airbags for dozens of brands, and over time it came out that the inflator could burst and fire metal shrapnel into the driver or passenger when it went off. It became the largest recall in American history, touching tens of millions of cars across many makers. People were hurt and killed by a part meant to save them. That is why an open recall is worth two minutes of your time, even on a car that seems to run perfectly. The lesson from that whole episode is that the people hurt usually had no idea anything was wrong. Their cars drove perfectly right up until the moment the part failed. That is the quiet danger of a recall: there is no warning light for a defect the maker is still learning about. A two-minute check is the only way to know whether one of these silent problems is riding along with you. I would rather you check and find nothing than skip it and carry an

WATCH OUT**8. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech***unfixed recall for years without knowing.*

A recalled part can sit quiet for years and then fail in an instant. The car feeling fine today tells you nothing about whether a recalled airbag or fuel pump is safe. **YOUR RESULTS 9.** Reading What the Tool Shows You Two outcomes, and both are useful. When the search finishes you will see one of two things. Either the page lists one or more open recalls, each with a short plain-English description of the problem and what the fix is, or it tells you there are no open recalls for that VIN. If recalls are listed, write down or print the page — you will want those details when you call the dealer. If none show up, that is good news for safety, though as you will see it does not mean the car has no history at all. Each recall listed comes with a plain description, so you are not left guessing what it means. It will say, in ordinary words, what the problem is — a faulty latch, a wiring issue, a brake concern — and what the remedy is. You do not need to decode any technical jargon. When you call the dealer, you can simply read them what the page says, or even better, give them the VIN and let them pull up the same information on their end. The dealer sees the identical recall details you do. **GOOD TO KNOW** Most browsers let you print the result or save it as a PDF. Keeping a dated copy is handy if you ever need to prove a recall was still open. **THE FINE PRINT 10.** What 'Zero Recalls' Does Not Mean A clean recall check is narrower than it sounds. Here is the part people miss. The NHTSA tool shows open recalls only — ones that have not yet been fixed on that specific car. It does not show recalls that were already repaired, and more importantly it does not show crashes, flood damage, a salvage title, the real mileage, or how many owners the car has had. So 'no open recalls' means exactly one thing: there is no unfinished safety fix waiting. It does not mean the car has a clean past. For a used car, you need more than this one check.

WATCH OUT

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I cannot stress this limit enough, because it is where people get burned. A fellow once showed me a clean recall printout and told me it proved his used car was 'checked out and perfect.' It proved no such thing — only that no safety recall was waiting. The car could still have been in a wreck or a flood. The recall tool is one narrow, valuable window into a car; it is not the whole house. Use it for what it does, and get the rest of the story from the sources we will cover. Do not let a seller wave a clean NHTSA printout as proof the car is spotless. It only speaks to open recalls, nothing else. THE FIX 11. Getting a Recall Repaired for Free The dealer does the work and sends no bill. If your check turns up an open recall, the fix is refreshingly simple. Call any franchised dealer for that brand — it does not have to be where you bought the car — and tell them you have an open recall you would like done. Give them the VIN and the recall described on the NHTSA page. They order the part if needed, book you an appointment, do the repair, and you drive away without paying. You do not need a warranty, a receipt, or to be the original owner. The free fix follows the car. Do not let being the second, third, or fourth owner make you shy about claiming the fix. The free repair belongs to the car, not to whoever first bought it. The dealer does not care how you came to own it or whether you have any paperwork from the original sale. You walk in with the VIN, they confirm the open recall, and they do the work. I have sent plenty of folks to dealers for recalls on cars they bought used, and not one has been turned away or charged. The fix is yours. Any brand dealer can do it, not just your seller. You pay nothing for parts or labor on a safety recall. Being the second or third owner does not matter. Bring the VIN and the recall details to speed things up.

NO CATCH

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12. What the Repair Costs You Free really does mean free here. People are so used to car repairs costing money that they are suspicious of a free one. I understand, but a safety recall truly costs you nothing. The maker funds it because the law requires them to make the car safe. The only thing it costs is a little time — a trip to the dealer and sometimes a wait for a part to come in. There is no upsell you have to accept and no fee for the recall work itself. If a shop tries to charge you for a recall repair, that is a red flag. If a shop ever tries to charge you for a recall repair, treat that as a bright red flag and go call another dealer. Genuine safety-recall work is paid for by the maker, start to finish, and no honest dealer will bill you for it. The only things a recall visit should cost you are a little time and maybe a wait for a part to arrive. Anyone turning a free safety fix into a paid repair is either confused or taking advantage, and you are well within your rights to say no and go elsewhere. GOOD TO KNOW If a recall left you stranded or forced a repair before the fix was available, some makers will reimburse what you spent. Ask the dealer about reimbursement when you book. THE APPOINTMENT 13. Making the Dealer Appointment A few minutes on the phone sets it up. Booking the recall repair is like booking any service visit. Call the dealer's service department, say you have an open recall, and read them the VIN. They will check whether the replacement part is in stock. Some recall fixes are quick and done the same day; others need a part ordered, so they may ask you to come back once it arrives. Ask roughly how long the car will be tied up so you can plan a ride if you need one. Many dealers offer a loaner or a shuttle for recall work. When you call, it helps to have a pen handy to jot down what they tell you — the appointment date, whether a part is on order, and roughly how long the car will be there. If the repair needs a part that is not in stock, ask them to call you when it arrives rather than leaving it to you to chase them. And ask about a ride: many dealers run a shuttle or lend a

OLD ONES

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loaner car for recall work, since the repair is on the maker's dime, not yours. A little planning on the phone saves a wasted trip.

- 1 Call the dealer's service department.
 - 2 Say you have an open recall and read them the VIN.
 - 3 Ask whether the part is in stock or must be ordered.
 - 4 Ask how long the car will be there and whether a loaner is available.
 - 5 Book the date and keep the paperwork they give you.
14. Recalls Already Taken Care Of
- Finished recalls simply drop off the list. You might wonder what happens to a recall after it is fixed. Once the dealer completes the repair and reports it, that recall no longer shows as open for your VIN. That is why a car can have had several recalls over its life and still show zero open ones on the tool. It is not hiding anything — those jobs are done. If you are curious whether a particular recall was ever performed, the dealer can look up the full recall record by VIN, which goes further back than the public open-recall list. This is why a car can show zero open recalls and still have had several over its life. The finished ones simply drop off the open list once the dealer reports the work done; it is not hiding anything from you, those jobs are complete. If you are curious about the full story, the dealer can pull up the car's entire recall record by VIN, which reaches back further than the public open-recall list and shows both what was recalled and what was actually repaired. For a used car, that complete record is well worth asking to see. TIP When buying used, ask the dealer to print the car's complete recall history by VIN. That shows both what was recalled and what was actually repaired.

STAY ALERT**12. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech**

15. The Free SaferCar App Let your phone warn you about new recalls. Recalls get issued all the time, including on cars that have been on the road for years. You cannot be expected to recheck the website forever. That is what the free SaferCar app is for. It comes from NHTSA, the same agency behind the website. You save your car's VIN in it once, and if a new recall is ever announced for your exact vehicle, the app sends you an alert. It is the set-it-and-forget-it way to never miss a recall on a car you own. I especially like the app for people who do not want to think about this ever again. You set it up once, with a little help if you like, and then it simply watches your car for you in the background. If nothing is ever recalled, you never hear from it. If something is, it taps you on the shoulder the day it happens. That is the kind of technology I love: it does a useful job quietly and asks nothing of you in between. For a lot of my customers, this app is the whole solution. Free, and made by the same agency as the website. Save your VIN once to watch that car. Get a phone alert the day a new recall is issued. Also lets you report a safety problem you have noticed. YOUR GARAGE 16. Saving a Car in the App Add the cars you own and the ones you watch. Inside SaferCar you build a little garage of the vehicles you care about. Add your own car by typing its VIN, and you can add a family member's car or one you are considering buying too. The app keeps each one on its watch list. You can also save car seats and tires, which carry their own recalls separate from the vehicle. Setting this up takes a couple of minutes per car and then runs quietly in the background, which is exactly what you want from safety. TIP If you are shy about apps, this is a gentle one to start with. There is nothing to buy, no ads pushing at you, and it does one honest job.

BEFORE YOU BUY**13. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech**

17. Checking a Used Car First Run the VIN before you hand over money. The best time to check a VIN is before you buy, not after. When you are looking at a used car, ask the seller for the VIN — a willing seller shares it happily — and run it through NHTSA right there on your phone. Open recalls on a used car are not necessarily a reason to walk away, since you can get them fixed free, but you want to know. If a seller refuses to give you the VIN or gets cagey, that tells you something all by itself. Running the check in front of the seller also tells you something about them. An honest seller will happily read you the VIN and wait while you check it, because they have nothing to hide. Someone who stalls, changes the subject, or suddenly rushes you is telling you to slow down. You are not being rude by checking — you are being a careful buyer, which any decent seller respects. If a used car is worth thousands of your dollars, it is surely worth two minutes of a stranger's patience while you look it up. Ask for the VIN; an honest seller gives it freely. Run the free NHTSA recall check on the spot. Open recalls can be fixed free after you buy, but know about them first. A seller who hides the VIN is waving a red flag. THE GAP 18. What NHTSA Will Not Tell You For a used car, recalls are only half the picture. I want to be very clear about this because it protects your wallet. The free government tool is wonderful for recalls, but it is silent on the things that matter most when buying used: whether the car was ever in a serious crash, whether it was flooded, whether the title is branded salvage or rebuilt, whether the odometer was rolled back, and how many owners it had. None of that lives in the recall tool. A car can be recall-clean and still have been underwater in a flood. You need a separate source for history. This gap is exactly where I have seen good people lose money. A car can pass the recall check with flying colors and still have been rebuilt after a serious crash, or dried out after sitting in flood water, or had its odometer wound back to look like it has fewer miles. None of that shows up in the free recall tool, because none of it is a recall. So please do not treat a clean recall result as a green light to buy. Treat it as step one of several, with the paid

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history report and a mechanic to follow.

Flood and salvage cars are often cleaned up and sold far from where the damage happened. The recall tool will not catch any of it. PAID REPORTS 19. Vehicle History Reports When it is worth paying a few dollars. For the history the government tool skips, you turn to commercial services. Carfax and VinAudit are two well-known ones. You give them the VIN, pay a fee, and get a report that tries to show past accidents, title problems, service records, and ownership changes. These are private companies, not the government, and no report is perfect — they only know what was reported to them. Still, before buying a used car, a history report is usually money well spent. Think of it as a cheap second opinion on a big purchase. No history report is flawless, so set your expectations fairly. These companies only know what was reported to them — by police, insurers, repair shops, and motor-vehicle departments. A crash that was settled quietly between two drivers, or a repair done by a backyard mechanic, may never appear. So a clean history report is reassuring but not a guarantee. The real value is in catching the big red flags: a salvage title, a flood brand, a string of owners in a short time, or an odometer that does not add up. Those are worth every penny to catch. What you want to know Where to look Open safety recalls NHTSA.gov/recalls (free) New recall alerts SaferCar app (free) Accidents and title history Carfax or VinAudit (paid) Full recall repair record Ask a brand dealer (free)

STAY SHARP

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20. When a 'Clean' Report Isn't No single report sees everything. Even a paid history report has gaps. If a crash was never reported to police or insurance, it may not appear. If repairs were done at a corner garage that does not report in, they stay invisible. So the smartest move is to stack your sources: run the free recall check, buy a history report, and still have a trusted mechanic inspect the car before you buy. Each one catches what the others miss. A clean report is reassuring, but it is a green light to look closer, not a reason to skip the mechanic. The smartest approach is to stack your sources rather than lean on any one. Run the free recall check, buy a paid history report, and still have a trusted mechanic look the car over before you hand across any money. Each catches what the others miss: the recall tool finds open safety fixes, the history report flags crashes and title trouble, and the mechanic spots the worn and tired parts no database ever records. A clean result from any single source is a reason to look closer, never a reason to skip the next check. TIP A pre-purchase inspection by an independent mechanic usually costs around a hundred dollars and can catch what no report ever will. DIRECT 21. The Maker's Own Recall Page Every brand has its own lookup too. Besides NHTSA, each carmaker runs its own recall-lookup page on its website. You type in the VIN and it shows recalls and sometimes other service campaigns for that brand. The maker's page occasionally lists owner-notification items a little sooner than the government tool, and it ties straight into booking at that brand's dealers. I still start with NHTSA because it covers every brand in one place, but checking the maker's page as well does no harm and sometimes turns up a bit more. I still begin with the NHTSA tool because it is one stop for every brand, but the maker's own page is a worthwhile second look, especially right after you buy a car. The maker sometimes posts owner-notification items and service campaigns there that are not safety recalls and so do not appear on NHTSA. And because the page ties into that brand's

THE TERMS

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dealer network, it often lets you start booking the repair in the same place you found it. A couple of extra minutes on the maker's site occasionally turns up something useful. Search the brand name plus 'recall VIN lookup' to find it. It covers that one brand, so you need a different page per make. Sometimes shows extra service campaigns beyond safety recalls. Often links straight to booking a dealer appointment.

22. Recalls, Campaigns, and TSBs

Not every maker notice is a free safety fix. You will run into a few different terms, and they are not all the same. A safety recall is the serious one the government tracks and the maker must fix free. A service campaign or 'customer satisfaction' program is a softer fix the maker offers, sometimes free, sometimes not. A technical service bulletin, or TSB, is just advice to mechanics about a known quirk and how to handle it — it is not a free repair and not a recall. When in doubt, ask the dealer which bucket a given item falls in, and whether it costs you anything. When in doubt about which bucket a given notice falls in, just ask the dealer two plain questions: is this an official safety recall, and does it cost me anything? A true safety recall is always free; a customer-satisfaction campaign may or may not be; and a technical service bulletin is only advice to mechanics, not a free repair at all. You do not need to memorize the jargon. Those two questions cut straight through the confusing terms and tell you exactly what you are dealing with and whether your wallet is involved.

GOOD TO KNOW The NHTSA tool deals in official safety recalls. Campaigns and TSBs may not appear there, which is another reason to also ask the dealer.

RENTALS**17. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech**

23. Recalls on Rental Cars The law caught up with rentals, slowly. People ask whether a rental car could have an open recall. It is a fair worry — there was a time when rental companies rented out recalled cars. The law now bars large rental companies from renting or selling a car with an open safety recall until it is fixed. That said, rules and enforcement vary, and smaller outfits are a grayer area. If you ever feel uneasy about a rental, you can type its VIN into NHTSA from the lot, the same as any other car. TIP Keep the NHTSA site bookmarked on your phone. It works just as well on a rental in a parking lot as it does at home. NOT JUST CARS 24. Tires and Car Seats Get Recalled Too Two things families forget to check. Recalls are not only for whole cars. Tires get recalled for defects that can cause blowouts, and child car seats get recalled fairly often for buckles and harnesses that do not hold. Both can be checked through NHTSA, and both can be watched in the SaferCar app alongside your vehicle. For a car seat you look it up by its model and manufacture date rather than a VIN. If you have little ones riding with you, a two-minute car-seat recall check is one of the kindest things you can do. For families with grandchildren who ride along, the car-seat check is the one I would not skip. Car seats get recalled surprisingly often, usually for buckles that can stick or harnesses that do not hold the way they should — exactly the parts you are trusting to protect a small child. You look a seat up by its model name and the date it was made, both printed on a label on the seat itself. If it turns up a recall, the maker fixes or replaces it free, same as a car. Two minutes for a child's safety is time very well spent. Tires are recalled by their brand and identification number. Car seats are recalled by model and date of manufacture. Both can be checked at NHTSA and watched in SaferCar. A recalled car seat is repaired or replaced free, like a car recall.

WAITING

18. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech

25. If the Part Isn't Ready Yet Sometimes the fix beats the parts supply. Now and then a recall is announced before the maker has enough replacement parts to go around. You will get a notice telling you there is a recall but to wait for a second letter when parts are available. That gap is frustrating, especially with a serious recall. The maker should tell you whether the car is safe to drive in the meantime, and if it is not, they may provide a loaner or other help. Do not ignore the notice — call the dealer, get on the list, and ask exactly what to do while you wait. If a notice tells you to wait for parts, get yourself on the dealer's list right away rather than setting the letter aside, because parts often go to whoever asked first. Ask the dealer plainly whether the car is safe to drive in the meantime, and if it is not, whether they will provide a loaner while you wait. A recall serious enough to outrun the parts supply is serious enough to take seriously. Do not let the letter slip to the bottom of a pile and be forgotten; a quick call puts you in line. **WATCH OUT** If a recall notice says to stop driving or park the car outdoors, take it seriously. Those warnings are rare and reserved for real danger. **KEEP RECORDS**

26. Holding On to Your Paperwork A little folder saves a lot of headaches. Whenever a recall gets done, the dealer hands you paperwork showing what was repaired. Keep it. A simple folder — paper or a photo on your phone — with your recall notices and completed-repair receipts is worth its weight. It proves the work was done if a question ever comes up, and it is gold when you go to sell the car, because a buyer can see the recalls were handled. The same folder is a fine home for your VIN photo, your title, and your registration. **TIP** Snap a phone photo of every recall receipt. Paper fades and gets lost; a photo in your albums is there for years.

LONG-TIME OWNERS

19. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech

27. Cars You Have Owned for Years Old cars get new recalls too. Do not assume recalls only matter for new or used-car shoppers. A recall can land on a model a decade after it was built, once a pattern of failures becomes clear. If you have driven the same car happily for years and never checked, there is no better day than today to run its VIN through NHTSA. You may find nothing, which is lovely, or you may find a free fix you never knew was owed to you. Either way you will know, and knowing is the whole point. I bring this up because long-time owners are the ones most likely to have never checked at all. You have driven the same car happily for years, nothing has ever gone wrong, so why look? But a recall can land on a model a decade after it was built, once a pattern finally shows up in the data. You may well find nothing, which is lovely. Or you may discover a free fix that has been owed to you for years without your knowing. Either way, a two-minute check settles it, and there is no reason to wait. **GOOD TO KNOW** There is no expiration on a safety recall fix. A car built fifteen years ago is still entitled to the free repair if the recall applies.

COMMON QUESTIONS 28. Questions I Hear a Lot Quick answers to the usual worries. A few questions come up again and again, so let me knock them out plainly. None of this is complicated once someone says it straight. Does checking cost money? No. The NHTSA recall check is always free. Do I need to own the car? No. You can check any VIN, including a car you are thinking of buying. Will checking register me for junk mail? No. The NHTSA tool does not ask for your name or email. Can the dealer refuse the free fix? No. A safety recall must be repaired at no charge. How often should I check? A couple of times a year, or save the VIN in SaferCar and let it tell you.

A ROUTINE**20. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech**

29. Build a Simple Habit Twice a year keeps you covered. You do not need to think about recalls daily. The gentle habit I suggest is to check twice a year — say, when the clocks change in spring and fall, since you are already fiddling with the car and the house anyway. Or skip even that by saving your VIN in the SaferCar app and letting it nudge you only when something new comes up. The goal is simply that you never drive around for years on an unfixed safety recall without knowing. Low effort, real peace of mind. GOOD TO KNOW Tie the check to something you already do twice a year, like changing the smoke-detector batteries. Pairing a new habit to an old one makes it stick. PEACE OF MIND 30. Is It Safe to Type My VIN? Your VIN is not a secret password. Some folks hesitate to type their VIN into a website, worried it is like giving out a bank number. It is not. Your VIN is visible through the windshield to anyone walking by, and it is on paperwork you hand over routinely. Typing it into the real NHTSA.gov site is perfectly safe. The only caution is to make sure you are on the genuine site and not a look-alike asking for payment or personal details. The real recall check never needs your name, address, or credit card. So please do not let worry about privacy stop you from doing this. Think about where your VIN already appears: visible through your windshield to anyone in the parking lot, printed on documents you hand to clerks and agents, stamped on a sticker in your door. It is simply not sensitive information the way a Social Security or bank number is. The only real caution is making sure you are on the genuine, free government site and not a look-alike fishing for your money or your personal details. On the real tool, the VIN is all you ever give. WATCH OUT If a 'recall' site asks for your credit card, Social Security number, or a login, back out. The honest tool asks for nothing but the VIN.

RECAP

21. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech

31. The Short Version Everything above, boiled down. Let me leave you with the whole guide in a nutshell so it sticks. The VIN is the car's unique 17-character number, found on the dash and the door and your paperwork. The free government tool at [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls) tells you if that car has an open safety recall, which any dealer will fix for free. The SaferCar app watches for new ones. And for buying a used car, the recall check is a great start but not the whole story — add a paid history report and a mechanic's eyes. VIN: 17 characters, on the dash, door, title, and insurance card. Free recall check: [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls). Recall fix: free at any brand dealer. New-recall alerts: the free SaferCar app. Used-car buying: add a paid history report and an inspection. GET HELP

32. When to Call Bill Happy to sit with you and run through it. If any of this feels like one step too many — finding the VIN, getting to the right website, reading the result, or lining up the dealer — that is exactly what I am here for. I am Bill, I have been doing in-home tech help in Portage County for more than thirty years, and I am glad to pull up a chair, find your VIN with you, and run the check together so you can see how easy it is. We can set up the SaferCar app on your phone too, so it keeps watch for you going forward. Give me a call at (330) 200-8042 and we will find a time. Bring any car you are thinking of buying and we will check it before you decide. No rush, no pressure, and my friendly guarantee stands behind every visit — if you are not comfortable with it by the end, we are not done. My assistant Sophie can help you get on the schedule. TIP Thinking of buying a used car soon? Call before you go, and we will check its VIN together so you walk in knowing more than the seller expects.

CHEAT SHEET**22. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech**

Everyday Cheat Sheet Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task. I want to... Do this I want to... Do this Find my VIN Look at the driver's-side dash by the windshield Check for open recalls Go to [NHTSA.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls) and type the 17-digit VIN Get a recall fixed Call any dealer for that brand; the repair is free Get alerts for new recalls Save your VIN in the free SaferCar app Check a used car before buying Run its VIN through NHTSA, then a paid history report See crash or title history Use a paid service like Carfax; NHTSA won't show it Get a hand with any of it Call me at (330) 200-8042 Get help Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

HOW I CAN HELP**23. For electrical, gas, water, or ladder work, please call a licensed professional. — Bill's Home Tech**

Your Visit — and My Promise In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included. Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo). GOOD TO KNOW My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated. Call or text (330) 200-8042 · Book a visit: billshometech.com/book · bill@billshometech.com This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

How to run the check

Four steps and you have your answer.

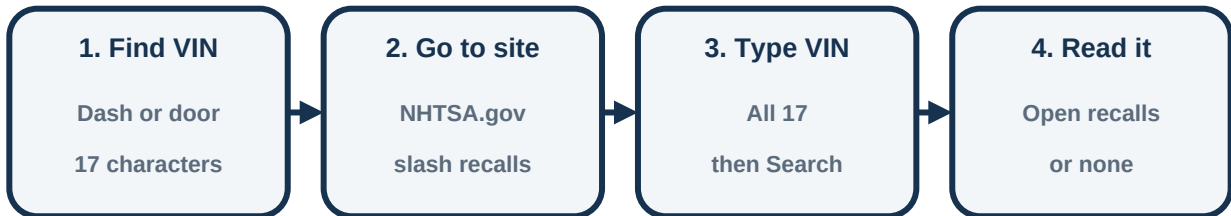
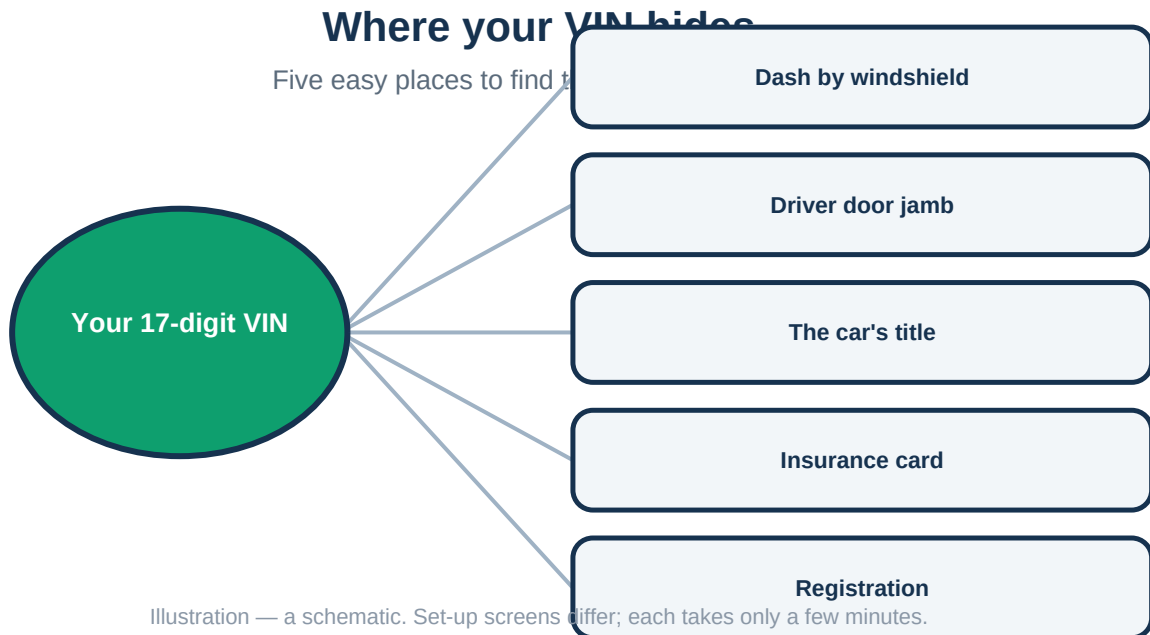


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look



BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.



HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

In-home visit — \$99 flat for your first visit. No contracts and no surprise charges, and a 30-day follow-up is included.

Remote Support — \$49 for a screen-share session. I only connect with your permission, you watch the whole time, and you can end anytime. If I can't fix it over the screen-share, I refund the \$49 — and if it turns out you need me in person, that \$49 goes toward your visit. It's included free for Support Plan members (\$39/mo).

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full \$99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Call or text **(330) 200-8042** · Book a visit: billshometech.com/book · bill@billshometech.com

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