

AVOIDING AUTO REPAIR RIP-OFFS

SHOP WISELY FOR AN AUTO REPAIR FACILITY

Look for an auto repair facility you can trust before you need a major repair:

- Try out several different repair shops when you need maintenance or minor repairs. If you are not satisfied with the service or results of one shop, try another shop until you find one you are comfortable with;
- Get recommendations from friends, family, and co-workers on repair shops they use and trust;
- Look for shops that have ASE certified mechanics;
- On-line recommendations and ratings may be helpful but only from reliable sources;
- Check the repair record of the shops with the Office of Consumer Protection, Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division and Better Business Bureau.

READ THE REPAIR AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST A WRITTEN ESTIMATE

Prior to performing any work, a repair shop must give customers an authorization form that contains their customer rights. These rights may be part of a written estimate and must be signed by the customer.

At a minimum, the authorization must tell customers that they:

- May request a written estimate for repairs that cost more than \$50;
- May not be charged more than 10% of the price on the written estimate without the customer's consent;
- Are entitled to the return of replacement parts except those that are required to be returned to the manufacturer under a warranty agreement;
- May not be charged for repairs not originally authorized.

A repair shop can verbally inform the customer of their rights if the vehicle was towed to the shop or if the customer leaves the vehicle when the shop is closed.

Note that a repair shop is required to provide a written estimate only if it is requested by the customer and the cost of the repair is over \$50. Getting a written estimate helps consumers avoid sticker shock since the repair facility's final price cannot exceed 10% of the estimate.

The estimate must include the following:

- The estimated completion date;
- Estimated price for labor and parts;
- Surcharges, if any.

A written estimate is not required, if the shop does not agree to perform the requested work.

REVIEW THE INVOICE CAREFULLY

The repair shop must have the customer sign an invoice for the completed work and give the customer a copy. The customer should review the invoice carefully to make sure s/he was not charged for work that was not authorized.

The invoice must list:

- All work performed, including all warranty work;
- All parts supplied;
- Any used or rebuilt parts have been supplied.

REQUEST THE RETURN OF REPLACED PARTS

To ensure that worn parts have actually been replaced, consumers should request the return of the replaced parts. In some cases, however, there may be a warranty agreement with the manufacturer that requires the return of replaced parts.

In other situations, a repair facility can send the replaced parts back to the manufacturer to be rebuilt and get a discount on the purchase of other parts. While the consumer can demand the return of these parts, the repair facility can lawfully charge the customer a fee for their return (to compensate the shop for the loss of the discount). While giving up the replaced parts will save the consumer money, the extra cost may be worth it if s/he has reason to believe that the facility did not actually perform the repair.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE WITH AUTO REPAIRS PERFORMED IN HOWARD COUNTY, CONTACT:

The Howard County Office of Consumer Protection
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**To obtain this factsheet in an alternative format, please contact the Office
of Consumer Affairs at 410-313-6420(voice/relay) or email us at
consumer@howardcountymd.gov.**