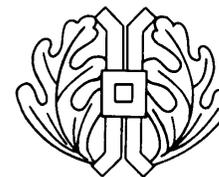


# PREVENTIVE LAW SERIES

## AUTOMOBILE REPAIRS



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*The best way to avoid auto repair rip-offs is to be prepared. Knowing how your vehicle works and how to identify common car problems is a good beginning. It is also important to know how to select a good technician, the kinds of questions to ask, and your consumer rights.*

### **How to Choose a Repair Shop**

Ask for recommendations from friends, family, and other people you trust. Shop around by telephone for the best deal, and compare warranty policies on repairs. Also, ask to see current licenses if state or local law requires repair shops to be licensed or registered. And make sure the shop will honor your vehicle's warranty.

### **How to Find the Right Technician**

Look for shops that display various certifications - like an Automotive Service Excellence seal. Certification indicates that some or all of the technicians meet basic standards of knowledge and competence in specific technical areas. Ask if the technician or shop has experience working on the same make or model vehicle as yours.

### **Repair Charges**

Before you arrange to have any work performed, ask how the shop prices its work. Some shops charge a flat rate for labor. Others charge on the basis of the actual time the technician worked on the repair. If you need expensive or complicated repairs, consider getting a second opinion. If you decide to get the work done, ask for a written estimate. The written estimate should identify the condition to be repaired, the parts needed, and the anticipated labor charge. Make sure you get a signed copy that also states the shop will contact you for approval for any work exceeding a specified amount of time or money. Once the work is performed, get a completed repair order that lists each repair, parts supplied, cost of each part, labor charges, and the vehicle's odometer reading when you brought the vehicle in and after the repairs were completed.

### **Warranties and Service Contracts**

There is no "standard" warranty on repairs. Make sure you understand what is covered under your warranty and get it in writing. Be aware that warranties may be subject to limitations, including time, mileage, deductibles, and businesses authorized to perform the warranty work.

Many vehicle dealers sell optional service contracts issued by vehicle manufacturers or independent companies.

Not all service contracts are the same; prices vary and usually are negotiable. To help decide whether to purchase a service contract, consider: its cost; the repairs to be covered; whether coverage is overlapped by another warranty; the deductible; where the repairs are to be performed; whether repair costs are paid directly by the company to the repair shop or whether you will have to pay first and get reimbursed; and the reputation of the service contract company.

## **Disputes**

Document all transactions as well as your experiences with dates, times, expenses, and the names of people you dealt with. Talk to the shop manager or owner first. If that doesn't work, contact your Attorney General or local consumer protection agency for help. Or, you can file a claim in small claims court.

### **LEGAL ASSISTANCE APPOINTMENTS:**

For an appointment to see a legal assistance attorney, please contact the Legal Assistance Office, located in Building 610, Naval Air Station North Island, by telephone at (619) 545-6278.

### **RESOURCES:**

California Department of Consumer Affairs: 1-800-952-5210, <http://www.dca.ca.gov/arp/>  
California Motor Vehicles Department, San Diego Field Office: 619-688-0227  
Better Business Bureau: (619) 496-2131, <http://www.bbb.org/alerts/index.html>  
National Automobile Dealers Association (N.A.D.A.): <http://www.nada.com/>  
Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission: (202) 326-2222, <http://www.ftc.gov/>  
Federal Trade Commission Regional Office: (415) 356-5270

