

BEHIND THE SCENES AT A COLLISION REPAIR BUSINESS

If your vehicle has been damaged in a collision, you probably heard this common misconception: your vehicle will never be the same. Chances are, it wasn't your insurance company representative or an employee of a collision repair business who said this. That's because every day collision repair industry professionals return collision-damaged vehicles to their previous condition - both structurally and cosmetically.

So what does it take to repair your vehicle properly after an accident? Because of today's complex vehicles and high-quality paint finishes, technicians need to be properly trained in the entire repair process to ensure complete and safe repairs.

The repair process begins when a detailed estimate is prepared, indicating all of the repairs needed. In some cases, this requires removing damaged body panels or other parts - this results in the most accurate initial estimate possible. The parts listed on the estimate are then ordered. The collision repair business and your insurance company should explain whether the replacement parts are new parts ordered from the manufacturer of your vehicle, used parts ordered through an automotive recycler or new parts manufactured by a company other than the manufacturer of your vehicle. Your collision repair business and insurer can explain the pros and cons of using each of these types of parts.

If your vehicle was hit hard in the collision, the repair facility should use a measuring system that checks specific points of your vehicle structure against dimensions provided by the vehicle or equipment manufacturer. The repair facility will also need to measure your vehicle several times during the repair process to make sure it is within the recommended tolerances. In most cases, this tolerance is as strict as three millimeters – the thickness of three dimes. Some vehicles today require a tolerance no greater than one millimeter.

Whenever appropriate, original parts are repaired, but severely damaged parts need to be replaced. A properly trained technician can repair sheet metal and plastic so that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to find any indication of damage. In some cases, parts not included on the estimate may need to be ordered during the repair process if unforeseen damage is found.

After repairs are complete, the vehicle is ready to be painted. The areas to be painted are first prepared; repaired areas are finely sanded, primer and corrosion protection products are applied and areas that won't be painted are "masked off" and protected. The painter then uses a paint mixing system to mix the paint that will match your vehicle's finish. A paint code on your vehicle provides the starting point, but generally requires a trained eye to match the paint exactly to your vehicle. The paint is sprayed inside a spray booth designed to keep dust and other contaminants off the new finish.

Once the painting is complete, the vehicle is reassembled with all trim pieces, decals and stripes. If any new glass is needed, it is usually installed at this point. The wheel alignment will also be checked if the collision damage was severe, or if the vehicle spun or if a tire or wheel was damaged in the collision. This helps to catch any potential problems with the steering and suspension parts.

Finally, your vehicle is taken to the detailing area for a thorough interior and exterior cleaning. Any minor imperfections in the new paint surface will be removed by polishing and buffing. A final check is made to ensure all work meets the repair facility's standards and the final paperwork is prepared for the vehicle owner and involved insurer.

Throughout this process, the repair business will be in contact with the insurance company handling the claim. The insurer may want to review the estimate and inspect the vehicle before or during the repair process. In some cases, the repair facility may need to obtain insurer and vehicle owner approval before completing additional necessary repairs not included on the initial estimate.

Locating a collision repair business that will follow the above procedures is important for any vehicle owner. Insurers and collision repair business owners alike say the key is looking for evidence of properly trained technicians. Technicians can learn how to properly repair a collision-damaged vehicle one of two ways – through training or by making mistakes. Do you want a collision repair technician "learning" on your vehicle?

One sign of a properly trained technician is the I-CAR[®] Gold Class Professionals[®] designation. This designation signifies the business has completed a significant amount of I-CAR training. I-CAR, an international not-for-profit organization, provides the industry's most comprehensive collision repair training, covering virtually every aspect of the repair process, including analyzing the damage, structural repair processes, corrosion protection, steel and aluminum welding, matching your vehicle's paint finish, and checking safety features such as airbag deployment,

seatbelts and anti-lock braking systems. I-CAR trained insurance and collision repair professionals share a common understanding of required repair methods, allowing them to work together to properly repair your vehicle. This leads to the most consistent, efficient and high-quality repairs.

For the location of an I-CAR Gold Class Professionals business in your area, visit **www.i-car.com** or call 800.422.7872.