

CONSUMER ADVISORY

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By Attorney General Tom Miller

Auto Repairs: Going Under the Hood

We tend to love our vehicles when they run, but when we drop them off to the repair shop we can't help but worry about the extent, cost and quality of the work. You'll worry a lot less if you choose the right repair shop and make sure to get written estimates.

Taking the time to find the right repair shop is time well spent, and may save you money. A coupon, advertisement, or website touting its low-price maintenance work and repairs may seem like a great deal, but not if it's a less-than-trustworthy shop.

Advertised maintenance specials may save you money. But watch out for repair shops that recommend surprise and possibly unnecessary repairs. If someone from the shop tells you that you'll need expensive or complicated repairs, consider seeking a second opinion and estimate.

Word of mouth advertising is often the most reliable way to find the right place. You can also check with the Consumer Protection Division or the [Better Business Bureau \(BBB\)](#) to see if anyone has filed complaints and how the business or mechanic responded.

If you're wondering about a shop's or mechanic's level of expertise, find out whether they are "ASE certified." The non-profit [National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence \(ASE\)](#) works to improve the quality of vehicle repair and service by testing and certifying automotive professionals. Certification alone, however, does not *guarantee* good or honest work, and there are also good mechanics who are not certified.

Under Iowa's Motor Vehicle Service Trade Practices Act, you have certain rights to help you avoid higher than expected repair charges:

- You have the right to receive a written or oral estimate for any repair that is expected to cost more than \$50, and shops must notify you of this right. Make sure to request a written estimate.
- The shop generally may not charge you a price that's more than the estimate, unless it contacts you with a higher estimate and you approve the additional cost.
- The repair shop may not charge you for any repairs that are unnecessary or that you did not authorize.
- The repair shop must disclose in advance if it charges for disassembly, reassembly, partially completed work, or any other work not directly related to repair or service.
- If the repair shop works with an outside repair or service supplier, the shop must provide, if you request one, an itemized receipt from the supplier.
- The repair shop may not use aftermarket crash parts without first disclosing it in the written estimate.

Disputes may come up even if you follow these tips. Try to resolve your problem directly with the repair shop. You will have a much better chance of success if you document your complaint, so keep copies of all estimates and invoices.

To file a complaint or for more information, contact the Iowa Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Bldg., Des Moines, IA 50319. Call 515-281-5926, or (toll-free) 888-777-4590. The website is: www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.gov.