

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Office of the  
Attorney General

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Tom Miller  
Attorney General



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February 2007

## Take the Scare Out of Auto Repair!

Car-repair complaints always rank high in Iowa, even though most repair shops treat customers fairly. The most common complaints are that a repair shop charged more than the estimate, or that the shop did work the customer had not authorized. Today's cars are computerized and complex machines, so doing our own diagnosis and repair is out of the question for most of us. Here are some things consumers can do to reassure themselves -- and protect themselves against being cheated in auto repairs.

### The most important step is to find the right repair shop and technician:

- Ask for recommendations from friends, family members, and others. Word-of-mouth is often the most reliable way to find a good shop or technician.
- Find a trusted shop and keep going back to it.
- For expensive or complicated repairs, get a "second opinion" and cost estimate.
- Be skeptical of advertisements for low-price maintenance work. Consumers sometimes pay for unnecessary repairs after shops do the advertised maintenance

### Know your rights under Iowa's *Motor Vehicle Service Trade Practices Act* (Iowa Code. Ch. 537B). These rights can help consumers avoid higher-than-expected repair charges:

- You have the right to receive a written or oral estimate for any repair that costs more than \$50, and repair shops must notify you of this right.
- The shop generally should not charge you a price more than the estimate -- unless it contacts you with a higher estimate, and you approve the additional cost. There can be situations where, without your approval, the final bill can be up to 10% higher than the estimate. An estimate must include all diagnostic and shop supply charges, disposal fees, and other similar charges. Estimates are not required to include taxes.
- The repair shop may not charge you for any repairs that are unnecessary or that you did not authorize.

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.

The [FTC brochure on auto repairs](#) has more good information. Find still more tips at the web site for the [Motorist Assurance Program](#).

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, Des Moines, IA 50319. Call 515-281-5926, or toll-free at 888-777-4590. The e-mail address is [consumer@ag.state.ia.us](mailto:consumer@ag.state.ia.us). On the Web: [www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.org](http://www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.org).

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