

### The Invoice

Check the invoice (also known as the work order) carefully, making sure you understand everything that was done and what you are paying for. Ask about anything that you do not understand.

Be sure to get a legible copy of the work order for your records. The charges for parts and labor must be itemized separately and indicate the use of any new, rebuilt, reconditioned or used parts.

### Test Drive Before You Pay the Bill

If you have made arrangements to do so, test drive the car before you pay your bill to determine whether the problem is solved. Always keep a copy of all work orders and receipts for as long as you own the car.

### Questions and Complaints

If you have questions or complaints about towing or repairs, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles, Consumer Complaint Center by calling 860-263-5405. You may also visit DMV's website at: [www.ct.gov/dmv](http://www.ct.gov/dmv)

If your complaint is about the *advertising* of towing or repair services, contact the State Department of Consumer Protection, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut 06106. You may print a complaint form from our website at: [www.ct.gov/dcp](http://www.ct.gov/dcp)



## If Your Car Breaks Down on the Road

Get your car as far off the road as possible.

Set out flares or reflective triangles to indicate that you have stopped.

Stay with your car until help arrives. If you feel you are in any danger, stay inside the car with the doors locked until the police arrive.

If your car must be towed, check the owner's manual for instructions. Some cars must be towed backwards; others require a flatbed tow.

Local police often have a list of available towing services if you get stranded. Confirm the cost before you allow your car to be hooked up to the truck.

Retrieve your car as soon as you can from the service station where it has been towed, unless you plan to have your car repaired there. Otherwise, you will be charged daily storage fees.

Remove all valuables and personal items like eyeglasses and medications from the car before you leave it.

Department of Consumer Protection  
450 Columbus Blvd, Suite 901  
Hartford, CT 06103

Toll-free: 1-800-842-2649

## What Everyone Needs to Know About Auto Repairs



## ***Want to avoid problems when bringing your car in for maintenance and repair?***

Each year, the Department of Consumer Protection hears hundreds of complaints involving motor vehicle repairs. We tell people that the best way to avoid repair problems is to be prepared and informed beforehand.

Learn how your vehicle works and how to identify common car problems. The more you know, the more likely you'll be able to head off costly repairs. You can find many common problems yourself by inspecting the area around your vehicle for leaks, listening for strange noises, being aware of a difference in the way your vehicle handles, or even by noticing unusual odors. When you do need a repair, choose a good technician, ask the right questions, and know your consumer rights.

Here are some tips for handling automobile work, whether it be unexpected or routine maintenance planned in advance.

### **Comparison Shop for Repairs**

Most consumers usually do a great job when comparing prices for appliances, furniture and food, but fall short when it comes to auto repair. Too often, the first estimate is the one they accept.

If your car still runs and you know what needs to be fixed, get at least three estimates. If you don't know what's wrong and a mechanic has to look the car over, you may have to pay a diagnosis charge.

Even though you may not want to spend time and money on more estimates and diagnostic fees, you may find that this adds up to a small fraction of the cost you'd pay at an over-priced repair shop. Shop around if you can!

### **Who Will Do the Work?**

In Connecticut, only the shop has to be licensed, not the individual mechanics. You may want to do a credential check before you leave your car for repair.

Ask whether the mechanic who will work on your car has a certificate from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence. Those who do will post their certificates at their service stations. For even more assurance, ask the person at the service desk to write down the name of the mechanic on your estimate, along with a note stating that this mechanic holds such a certificate.

### **Diagnosing the Problem**

Describe your car's symptoms to the mechanic. But unless you're **sure** about what the problem is, don't diagnose it yourself. You may end up paying for more than what's needed.

### **About Diagnostic Fees**

Repair shops must post a sign if there is a diagnosis or estimate fee. If that fee is more than \$50, you must sign a written consent.

### **Get a Written Estimate!**

You have the right to a written estimate before the repair work is done if the total cost of the repair will be more than \$50.

A repair shop cannot work on your car without your authorization first. (If the cost is expected to be less than \$50, you can still get a written estimate if you ask for one.) Be sure to ask how long the work will take.

### **Plan on a Test Drive**

Let the shop know in advance that you want to test drive the car once it's fixed and before you pay the bill.

### **The Work Authorization**

If you cannot wait for the written estimate to be prepared, ask the shop to prepare the estimate after you leave, and call you for a verbal approval. The repair shop cannot charge you for any work done without your authorization. And, if additional work is required beyond the original estimate, another authorization must be obtained from you before they continue. If the necessary work cannot be estimated, you may waive your right to a written estimate and give a general written authorization allowing the repair shop to make all "reasonable and necessary" repairs, but be sure to tell the shop the **maximum** amount of money you're willing to spend.

### **Return of Parts**

You are entitled to the return of any replaced parts, if you request them before or at the time the car is returned to you. If the parts have to be returned to the manufacturer, you are entitled to inspect them before they are sent.

Find out if the parts to be replaced will be new, used, or rebuilt. Any new part should come with a warranty; be sure to ask for it.