

The Official Newsletter of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut

Keeping Your Customer Involved & Informed

“On The Minds of Members” talks with members about communicating with your customer



“Save The Date”
Mike Anderson of Collision Advice
March 12th - Branford - 6:30pm

“In Unity There is Strength; In Knowledge There is Power”

Your Car, Your Choice - Find us at www.abaconn.org

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ABAC President's Message

Bob Amendola

Involve & Inform Your Customer ALWAYS!



Due to the continually increasing complexity of repairs and navigating insurance policies, it has never been more important to have honest conversations with vehicle owners about what a proper repair entails and what the insurance company may refuse to cover. You must have these conversations with your customer from day 1.

Do not surprise them with this at the end. Ultimately, it may never become an issue but if it does, the customer will be prepared and will not blame you.

Our end goal is not to charge our customer the difference, but we will not absorb the deficiency. There is an understandable concern that if you charge the customer the difference, they will be upset with you, pull the car, and never come back. That isn't the case.

By being straightforward, honest, and informative with your customer from the start, it allows them to make the decision to repair their vehicle at your shop regardless of the fact that they may have to kick in for what the insurance company doesn't pay for. Others may say I will not do that and opt not to have the vehicle repaired with you. Some simply cannot afford it. That's fine. Why would you want to fix their car and lose money? The more commonplace this becomes; the sooner people will pay more attention to the type of insurance policy they purchase.

We must remind ourselves that this is not our fight. If they purchased a substandard policy, that is an unfortunate lesson they will have to learn. We need to get out of the habit of making it our problem and absorbing that loss. If a customer is working with a particularly difficult company, we will try to first circumnavigate it and see if we can go through the other company instead (situation of a claimant).

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If that isn't an option, we will have the conversation with them that while we will do our best to get everything covered by the insurance company, there may be out of pocket expenses for them that are beyond our control.

We will not compromise the quality of their repair, utilize inferior parts etc. When people understand the facts of the situation, more often than not, they will choose to proceed with the understanding that they are responsible for what the insurance company ultimately does not cover.

All of this to say that the more involved and informed your customer is, the more proactive they can be to advocate for themselves and their claim. Many will get the insurance company to cover the difference, some may get reimbursed after the fact, some may have to pursue the matter through small claims court or arbitration, and some may not end up getting reimbursed at all. While we hope to not have the issue in the first place, this is not our problem. We are in the business of repairing cars properly and safely. Charge what you are worth and do what you are charging for. Involve your customer from the start, and you'll find that things aren't such a battle and grind every day anymore.

Please continue to support your association; onwards and upwards!

Sincerely,

Bob Amendola

Autoworks of Westville

President - Auto Body Association of Connecticut

Autoworksofwestville@gmail.com



**Unity is Strength - Knowledge is Power
Attitude is Everything**

March 12th Membership Meeting: Mike Anderson to Address Operational Leadership & Shop Culture



The ABAC Board of Directors are excited to host Mike Anderson at our upcoming membership meeting on March 12th at Woodwinds in Branford. Mike brings a nationally renowned energy and expertise to the stage, and you won't want to miss this meeting!

Mike's presentation is going to address operational leadership, shop culture and how both elements relate to talent acquisition and retention. Jillan Dawley and I attended the SCRS Education Series at SEMA this year and we were fortunate enough to attend Mike's presentation on operational leadership. We both agreed that it was hands-down one of our favorite seminars that we attended.

His presentation really motivated me personally to go back to the shop and take an honest evaluation of how we are doing in terms of our leadership and shop culture. He provided great ideas, resources and tools to do a self-assessment and ways we can improve aspects where we fall short.

We are in a phase at our shop where we are bringing in new technicians and training them in house. I found Mike's presentation really helpful when I think about how we can improve that process and more effectively retain them long term.

A common oversight as employers is how our employees feel valued and appreciated. Mike mentioned a great point that people want to be rewarded differently. I think this is especially important as we work to address the workforce shortage. The incoming generation may want different benefits and bonus systems etc. than our current technicians. It is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The sooner we realize that and adjust as leaders, the sooner we will be able to recruit and retain talent.

I HIGHLY recommend you make it to this meeting, and it would be a great idea to bring your managers/supervisors to the meeting as well.

RSVP YES!

March 12th | 6:30PM

The Woodwinds
29 School Ground Road
Branford, CT 06405

See you there,

Ashley



COLLISIONADVICE

“On The Minds of Members”

In this edition of The ABAC News we asked a few questions to members about communicating with their customer and the involvement of insurance companies.

Tony Ferraiolo - A&R Body Specialty - Wallingford

How do you communicate with your customer when you become aware that the insurance company is not intending on paying for the full cost of repairs?

This is assuming that you have already had a conversation with your customer when they first dropped off their car. Your customer needs to know that they may have to pay the cost differences in repair if their insurance company does not pay for certain repairs. At this point you would fill out a cost repair sheet, showing what the differences are between what was paid for by the insurer, and what was not, and you then will have three choices:

- You bill the customer the difference.
- You absorb it.
- Take an assignment of proceeds from your customer and you step in their shoes and collect the money owed to them in small claims court.

These are the three choices that we use, and we try not to use the third option although I do have one that I'm in the process of filing right now in small claims court because the other two options were not going to satisfy us or be able to make us whole, so we have elected to litigate. Again, this can only happen after you have discussed this with your customer when they are signing the Repair Contract.

What percentage of the time do you require payment from the customer if the insurance company has not paid for the full cost of repair?

About 20% or less of the time. I think this low figure would show that we are doing a good job of getting the concessions and bottom-line figures that we need to. I believe that this figure is becoming even less because of knowledge that the ABAC has been presented at meetings and with sharing with members in the ABAC News. As a matter of fact, we can thank Tony Lombardozzi, President of the Coalition for Collision Repair Excellence and ABAC Legal Counsel Attorney John Parese for showing members of the ABAC the legal ways performing these procedures properly.

Do you follow up with your customers to see if they later receive insurance reimbursement, and if so, how often does the insurer agree to reimburse your customer?

Some customers we do follow up with, but not all the time because once they've elected to pay the difference or go to small claims court themselves, they will inform us if they ever need to return for another repair. If we feel they have strong case to collect, we certainly will follow up because we want to hear that they have been reimbursed. We certainly don't want to place our customer in harm's way. They should be compensated for the way the repair was performed.

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Which insurance companies are most likely to follow existing laws, and which are most likely to break existing laws?

In my opinion, unless you challenge the insurance companies, they are all most likely to break existing laws if you allow them to do that. Their appraisers will be influenced to ignore the existing laws, with Allstate being the worst of them all. There are exceptions, especially some of the smaller carriers that are out of state. I can say that we've experienced every insurance company trying to stretch the law.

Are you having more or less difficulty these days being reimbursed by insurance companies for following OEM repair procedures?

If you are documenting properly, you should have less difficulty being reimbursed by insurance companies. I refer back to the education that we have been receiving from attending ABAC meetings. You can use this information to your advantage so you can avoid the pitfalls of being coerced by the insurance companies. Remember, YOU repair the vehicles, not the insurance company.

Kevin Clavette - Ace Auto Body - Hartford

How do you communicate with your customer when you become aware that the insurance company is not intending on paying for the full cost of repairs?

The conversation about the bill should be discussed when the vehicle is dropped off. Most of us in the industry know which insurance companies pay for what, and which companies will deny paying paint materials, scans, calibrations, mark-up, etc. This is your chance to explain to the customer that they may have to be involved in the negotiation process of their claim. When you have the insured educated and "on your side" it is way easier to get claims processed. The insurance company representative typically has a much harder time explaining themselves to a client that is being short-paid when the shop has all the documentation necessary to repair the client's vehicle.

What percentage of the time do you require payment from the customer if the insurance company has not paid for the full cost of repair?

I wouldn't say our shop has a percentage of time that we charge customers. It's on a per claim basis. It has more to do with what is the percentage of the total bill paid. That determines whether or not we bill a customer. For example, if I only lost 5% of my paint and materials bill it may not be worth it, but 20% of that same materials bill? Now that may be worth it, depending on the total amount of the materials bill.

Do you follow up with your customers to see if they later receive insurance reimbursement, and if so, how often does the insurer agree to reimburse your customer?

Yes, we typically do follow up. Insurers typically always reimburse their clients for our bills. But to be honest, usually the only dispute with our billing is the paint and materials invoices.

Which insurance companies are most likely to follow existing laws, and which are most likely to break existing laws?

Most insurance companies follow existing laws. The problem is us as shops don't use those laws to our favor. That's why involving the customer is crucial to getting fully reimbursed. It's the insurance companies' duty to make the customer whole again.

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The reason why insurance companies say “no” to shops so often is because they have no contract with shops, or any reason to pay us what we are asking. (Because we are asking), bill the insured, and the insurance company will have to make them whole again.

Allstate will break any and every law not to pay a loss. We do not repair Allstate claims anymore because of their pure neglect to care about their client or any laws.

Are you having more or less difficulty these days being reimbursed by insurance companies for following OEM repair procedures?

The industry as a whole has definitely improved over the past couple of years. It may be because shops are getting more aggressive in negotiations, and less willing to take the beating from the insurance companies anymore. With that said, we are getting paid for more OEM procedures.

Ashley Brunelle - Autoworks of Westville - New Haven

How do you communicate with your customer when you become aware that the insurance company is not intending on paying for the full cost of repairs?

We just had a good example with a car being involved in a front-end collision. We had an insured who brought in their Mercedes and with no way of knowing ahead of time, we removed the front bumper cover only to find that an aftermarket cover was used on their vehicle, evidently from a previous repair. Obviously, we do not use aftermarket parts, but we couldn't even find this cover in the supply chain even if we wanted to. We informed the insurance company.

Now, due to the fact this was an aftermarket part on the vehicle, we would be replacing it with a new one, none of the moldings, none of the retainers, none of the clips would fit properly on that new factory cover. We ended up with an \$800+ short pay so I called the owner, explained to them what was going on and that we did everything we could to try and get the insurance company to pay for the difference and that we did not feel the customer should be responsible for this charge, but our hands were tied. To fix the car properly, this is what it took to do that and due to the fact that the insurance company will not pay the difference we suggested to our customer that they take it up with their insurance company. This is not a comfortable conversation to have with your customer. They will be on the defensive.

Every customer is different. You need to gauge your customer. We have a script that we use. Call it a 'standard operating procedure' if you will but it varies depending on your customer. I also followed up with this customer with a detailed email listing everything that was done that was not covered. We then gave him the tools needed to feel confident about taking up this issue with his insurance company. We try to be informative; we try and keep the conversation comfortable and keep them in the loop and educate the customer as best we can by using the tools that we have learned from attending all the ABAC meetings but, at the end of the day, it's not our problem. I didn't purchase this policy, I didn't purchase the car, I didn't damage the car, I don't insure cars; so, this issue is strictly between the customer and their insurance company. We do our best to help them understand but the customer must pay the bill. If we end up charging the customers the difference, most of the time, the customers completely understand, and they are not upset WITH US. They may be frustrated, disappointed etc. but it is towards the insurance carrier- not us.

I understand the fear that if we pass the deficiency on to the customer, we will lose customers etc. but that has not been my experience so far. Again, much of that is due to transparency from the start.

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It allows the customer to understand the potential out of pocket expenses and make an informed decision about having their vehicle repaired with us regardless of that. Not everyone can be a customer. We need to focus less on fixing every potential job that comes through our doors and instead focus on jobs where we can provide a safe and proper repair and be compensated properly for the services we provide.

What percentage of the time do you require payment from the customer if the insurance company has not paid for the full cost of repair?

A lot of this hinges on how transparent you are with your customer from the beginning. I don't believe in surprising the customer at the end of the repair with their invoice. You need to have conversations with your customer leading up to this point even though you can't predict what's going to happen with a repair. Once again, it depends on the situation; it depends on the customer. Sometimes you're put between a rock and a hard place. You can hold the car, but you can't get blood from a stone. We will not compromise our work; we will not compromise the integrity and safety of our customer's vehicle. When explained to the customer from the beginning of the repair and they are aware of the potential extra cost, 100% of the time, the customer will pay the difference. Ultimately, transparency and communication with your customer is of key importance.

Do you follow up with your customers to see if they later receive insurance reimbursement, and if so, how often does the insurer agree to reimburse your customer?

Brunelle - The case that I mentioned earlier is still ongoing so there is no resolution as of this moment but I have been in touch with the customer so, yes, we do follow up. Most of the time we don't because I don't want to involve myself since the issue really had nothing to do with me. At this point it's between the customer and the insurance company. We follow up but do not intervene. Some are successful, others no. Again, we try to keep the customers educated with their options.

Which insurance companies are most likely to follow existing laws, and which are most likely to break existing laws?

Brunelle - One of the biggest offenders is Allstate, which led us to stop accepting any work from them. Bristol West, State Farm and USAA are my top 3 that we typically have violations with, and they have the highest DOI complaints. Most of the smaller companies will typically follow existing laws. Amica, Nationwide and Geico would also be on the list of companies that follow the laws. As we teach at the meetings, these are Connecticut Laws, use them. Members are very good at using these laws. Come to the meetings. Read the ABAC News and get educated!

Are you having more or less difficulty these days being reimbursed by insurance companies for following OEM repair procedures?

Brunelle - With some of the smaller companies, there are no issues at all. Some of the mainstream carriers make it a challenge. My rule of thumb is the more they advertise, the more likely they are to be difficult to deal with or more likely to have an issue paying a claim. They always try to use the worn-out terms like 'it's the cost of doing business' or 'we don't pay for that!'

Jillian Dawley - Dawley Collision & Customer - Waterford

How do you communicate with your customer when you become aware that the insurance company is not intending on paying for the full cost of repairs?

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We start that conversation when the customer first books their appointment. In order to leave their vehicle with us, the customer needs to sign the paperwork acknowledging the fact that we did have a discussion and that there may be some type of copay. The discussion consists of questions such as who their insurance company is and, did they already get an estimate? If they did already receive an estimate, I ask that they send that estimate to me. I will call them after and go over that estimate and at that point I will be able to tell them what their insurance company had approved for "X" and our posted labor rate is "Y" (and we won't work for less than our posted labor rate). We then let them know that if their insurance company doesn't consent to pay more, there may be an out-of-pocket expense for them, the customer. I let them know that many insurance companies are different, and I can never say how it will go with their insurer until the car comes in and gets disassembled. Every repair is different and there are so many variables that can affect the repair cost. Most customers understand but there is always the customer that could be concerned about cost and asks for a bit more information. I will do the math on their estimate on what the cost difference COULD be but again, there are too many variables that go into a repair and the customer ultimately gets it.

What percentage of the time do you require payment from the customer if the insurance company has not paid for the full cost of repair?

If there is a deficiency it's always required that the customer pay it. We have been making deficiencies the customers responsibility for about 3 years now and I would say the amount and frequency of the deficiencies has dropped. Whether that be from insurance carriers going up on their rates or appraisers working harder to make the numbers work. The more it is done, and the more appraisers are met with disgruntled customers who are armed with more knowledge, the less it has been happening. Often, the adjuster and I have met and negotiated a number to try to minimize the cost to the customer.

Do you follow up with your customers to see if they later receive insurance reimbursement, and if so, how often does the insurer agree to reimburse your customer?

We have had customers call to let us know that they did get reimbursement from their company after they submitted a bill to them. But no, we do not regularly reach out to them after the fact. It would depend on the circumstances of the claim.

Which insurance companies are most likely to follow existing laws, and which are most likely to break existing laws?

Due to the fact they make it so difficult to do business with them and a very miserable process for both us and the customer, we don't work with Allstate insurance at all. I would like to apply the same policy to State Farm, but we haven't gotten there yet. State Farm has refused to send a physical appraiser to our facility on a supplement. I tell customers that generally speaking, the more a company spends on advertising and marketing the worse they are to work with. The smaller companies tend to be easier to work with for both us and the customer whether it be moving in a more timely manner, paying the bill in full, utilizing OEM parts, sending appraisers out to the shop etc.

Are you having more or less difficulty these days being reimbursed by insurance companies for following OEM repair procedures?

I'm not sure if that really applies here. When an appraiser comes in, I give them my bill. This is how we're doing the job and they either write that or they get to my number. Due to the policies that we have in place, I don't feel like this is an issue.

Submitted by Don Cushing

Consumers take another run at The Hartford with class action lawsuit.

Guess who's back in court fending off another class action lawsuit? You guessed it, our old friend, The Hartford. In this new case, titled Janet Hobson, Et. Al. v. Hartford Insurance Company of the Midwest and Twin City Fire Insurance Company, the plaintiffs claim the Hartford undervalued totaled vehicles thereby cheating its insureds. The eighty-six page complaint alleges in part that The Hartford:

[V]iolated their straightforward contractual obligation by directing its third-party vendor to systematically reduce the total-loss valuations. Specifically, Defendants' third-party vendor determines the ACV of an insured total loss vehicle by taking the average price of "comparable vehicles" in the relevant market, adjusted for documented differences between the comparable vehicle(s) and the insured vehicle in mileage, equipment, and condition. After the vendor determines the price for "comparable vehicles," however, Defendants instruct its vendor to apply an arbitrary, baseless, and illegal "projected sold adjustment" ("PSA") reduction to each comparable vehicle where list price is not identified. This reduction artificially reduces the ACV calculation of the total-loss vehicle and, consequently, reduces the amount of Defendants total loss payment to insureds.

This PSA reduction is arbitrary, capricious, and baseless. Indeed, the data on which it is purportedly based shows the very opposite is true—that vehicles sell for their listed price, not for hundreds of dollars less than their listed price. So, Defendants and its vendors simply ignore or exclude the data.

These allegations are compelling. With that said, it is still early in the proceedings, and all we have so far are allegations in a Complaint. As you know from prior experience, class action litigation is inherently challenging and fraught with unique hurdles. I will keep an eye on this case as it progresses, and I will update you accordingly. With any luck, this case will succeed, or at least serve to remind the insurance industry that it cannot go on cheating consumers with impunity.



John M. Parese is a partner at the New Haven-based firm of Buckley Wynne & Parese

John M. Parese, Esq. is a Partner with the law firm of Buckley Wynne & Parese and serves as General Counsel to the ABAC. Buckley Wynne & Parese maintains offices in New Haven, Hartford and Stamford, and services clients throughout all of Connecticut. The opinions set forth in Attorney Parese's articles are for education and entertainment purposes only and should not be construed as legal advice or legally binding. If you have any questions or concerns about the content of this or any of Attorney Parese's articles, you are encouraged to contact Attorney Parese directly.





HIRING?

In light of the ongoing technician shortage, the ABAC has begun a long-term campaign to promote the collision repair industry to potential candidates. As a benefit to our membership, we created a page on our website dedicated to career opportunities exclusively with our member shops.

As part of our campaign, we will be promoting this section of our website in an effort to direct potential candidates to our members.

If you have any open positions, simply visit abaconn.org, select the careers page and complete the form. Please complete the form for each position separately.





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In the fast-paced and dynamic world of the automotive industry, the role of a Dealership Parts Director is crucial for the smooth functioning of various aspects of the business. Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down and have an insightful conversation with **Skye Mazuroski, Parts Director at Long Automotive**, an experienced Auto Parts Director with a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the field. Our discussion delved into the challenges, innovations, and future trends shaping the auto parts sector.

Longevity in the Wholesale Parts Industry

Long Subaru and Cadillac have been serving the Massachusetts area for well over 90 years. A family run dealership that is in the hands of many long-time professionals.

Skye got involved in the automotive industry during high school when he began working part time at Long Automotive for Tom Schube, who is the semi-retired parts director. After graduating college, Skye took a position as a parts advisor. *"I worked my way through the parts department and eventually into wholesale by trying to learn everything I could, paying attention to detail. Working next to Tom Schube and Assistant Manager Kenny Parker, I was able to hone my skills. This is not to say it hasn't been a challenge. Anyone involved in the automotive parts industry knows just how difficult it has been these last few years dealing with all of the dynamics that change constantly,"* says Mazuroski. Skye emphasized the importance of staying abreast of technological advancements, market trends, and factory changes to make informed decisions that keep the business competitive.

Challenges in the Auto Parts Sector

One of the key challenges discussed was the global supply chain disruptions that have affected the availability of auto parts. Skye shed light on how these disruptions have compelled industry professionals to reevaluate

and optimize their supply chain strategies. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of fostering strong relationships with customers so that they understand the challenges that the dealership is facing when trying to fill their orders.



Offsite Wholesale Operations

Long's wholesale operation is based in Framingham with their Cadillac dealership in Southboro and their Subaru store in Webster. All parts are shipped from the wholesale warehouse. Skye has 39 employees, 9 of which are dedicated wholesale advisors.

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Delivery areas include just about all of Massachusetts from Boston to Springfield; Northern and Central Rhode Island and the Route 6 area of Connecticut along with Hartford. As mentioned before, Kenny Parker also assists as the Outside Wholesale Representative, making sure that Long maintains their high rate of customer satisfaction. All of Long's customers are familiar with Parker since he has been a mainstay there for 40 years!

Sustainability in Auto Parts

Sustainability is becoming a focal point in the automotive industry, and Mazuroski expressed his views on how he uses programs to help collision repairers. *"We use OEConnections's CollisionLink and CCC for our shops. We rely heavily on the customer support that we receive from these programs. We rely on the competitive pricing that these programs can offer since shops don't necessarily want to use aftermarket parts. By offering competitive pricing, and allowing the shops to use OEM parts, they don't need to worry about fit and finish,"* Mazuroski tells us.

Challenges in Stock

"I try and make sure we have sufficient stock on hand. While we use GM's RIM program, certain events dictate when changes are needed. For example, we were set up pretty well during the recent UAW strike. We needed to make sure we were going to have what shops needed. It's not a perfect science but we were able to weather the storm and even had dealers calling us for stock. Although it required extra work, we remained competitive. We are proud of our inventory fill rate," he said.

How did you become an ABAC Supporting Advertiser?

"Tom Schube has been an active member of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut for many years. His belief was always to support the local automotive community and once we started servicing and delivering parts to Connecticut, it only made sense to support the shops who do business with us. So, we became a supporting advertiser in the ABAC News. Shops need to get their customers back on the road, as soon as possible. Hopefully, our services we offer, help those shops get that done as quick as possible. The shops need support, OEM information and most importantly, a voice in the industry. It's really a 'no-brainer' to be part of an association that is as strong as the ABAC," Skye explained.



Long Automotive has no plans to slow down as they continue to grow in the New England Markets and beyond. The ABAC would like to thank Skye and his staff for an inside look at Long Automotive's wholesale operation. We are very honored to have the support of Long automotive!

And to all of our ABAC Members,
Support Those Who Support You!

Submitted by Don Cushing

Radar Compliant Paint: Refinishing more than cosmetic job as vehicle technology advances



As technology advances, automotive refinishing has become more than a cosmetic function — it could be the difference between life and death.

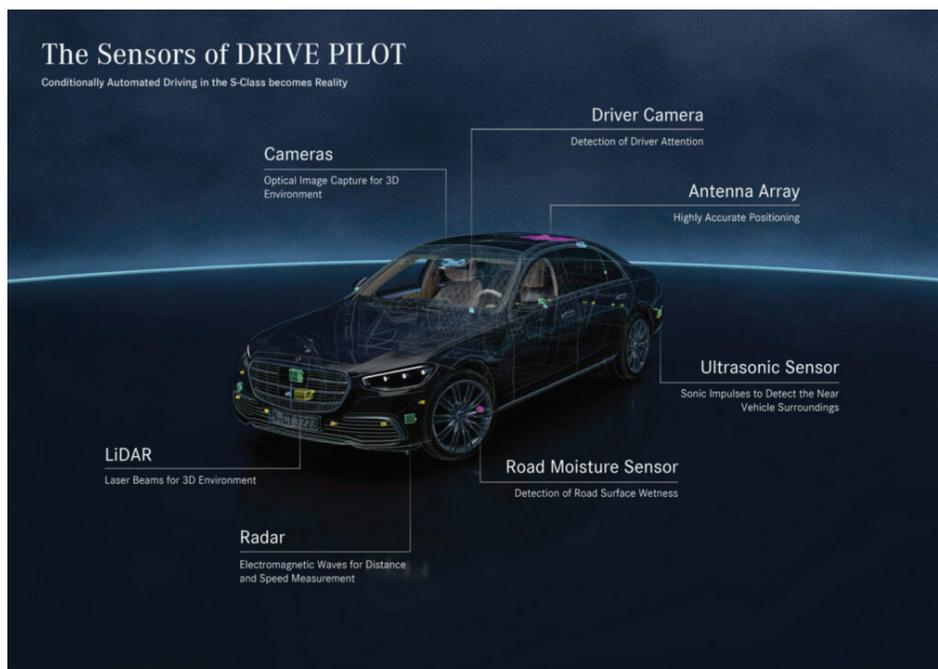
The refinishing step in the repair process needs a new level of precision when it involves a vehicle with radar and sensors used for safety features, a Collision Industry Conference Parts and Materials Committee panel said during a Palm Springs, California meeting Jan. 17.

Benito Cid, Mercedes-Benz USA collision programs manager, said the company continues advancing technology that uses sensors, cameras, radar and more, included as part of the technology suite in its Level 3 automated driving feature, Drive Pilot, in California and Nevada in 2023.

“All of these things require a clear line of sight,” Cid said. Ensuring the repair process and products don’t interrupt the line of site of those systems is why “looking at the procedures is even more important at this point.”

Repairers can’t repaint some parts with sensors, Cid said. Sometimes, replacing the part is the only option.

Other colors have a maximum amount of layers of coating such as primer, paint and clear, he said. Some of these parts can only be painted one additional time.



Cid showed a slide with multiple colors that can’t be repainted in a repair.

The colors ranged from white, beige, gray and black. He also displayed the Mercedes-Benz procedure for information on painting bumpers with radar sensors, which specifies paints approved for refinishing the bumper.

Any other color is not approved for refinishing.

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“We can’t just say it’s gray or white,” Cid said. “We have to be looking at this and make sure we have the right information. You are sending someone out onto the road with this vehicle that may or may not function as it should.”

Ryan Brown, western technical manager for AkzoNobel said repairers who work on structural damage know the importance of checking an OEM manual. “Paint has always been cosmetic,” Brown said. “It is no longer just cosmetic.”

AkzoNobel, a paint and coating company, tests their products in conjunction with OEMs to find the correct formulas needed to keep sensors working, Brown said. OEMs make and document correct procedures in their manuals, but it is the repairer’s responsibility to follow that procedure, he said.

“There’s an astoundingly low amount of them [refinish technicians] who have ever used or seen one of these manuals,” Brown said. “Make sure to get it into the hands of people refinishing the car.”

Manufacturer procedures vary for each make and model, Brown said. He added that the information can change. “We constantly have to go back and access this information because there may be changes to it in the future,” Brown said.

Brown said manuals used to be printed out and left nearby for technicians to grab. However, as technology advances quickly, it is important to find the most up-to-date manual online each time.

After finding the correct information on OEM portals, repairers must know how to select the correct color formula for both color match and radar functionality, Brown said.

A slide Brown showed said repairers must also know the radar transparent color search steps in MIXIT — AkzoNobel’s cloud color database. He said Radar Transparent Formulas can be found in MIXIT module access via the MIXIT help center. Doing these steps is important because calibration isn’t always accurate, he said. “Make sure those sensors retain their functionality and integrity,” Brown said.

Brown listed factors refinishers should pay attention to in or around the radar sensor:

- Material thickness of the substrate
- Primer has limited impact on transmission
- Clear coat has limited impact on transmission
- No blending of any material, including base coat or clear coat, in the radar zone as this disrupts the signal
- No body filler repair including welding or repair to the plastic substrate is allowed
- No manual tinting or color correction of the approved color
- No optimization or correction steps are allowed with Automatchic
- Sanding and polishing are possible if there is a paint defect in the final finish
- OEM radar repair manuals should advise on rectifying or overcoating a paint defect
- OEM radar repair manuals should advise if the paint system should be removed if there is a paint defect

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Factors that could influence a radar sensor when applying a base coat:

- Aluminum particles influence transmission
- Course aluminum, less impact
- Finer aluminum, higher impact
- Argentum has the highest impact
- Pearl and Xirallic have limited impact
- Solid toners have limited impact

Brown said the factors are suggestions and refinishers still have to check the requirements for each job with the OEM manual for each repair.

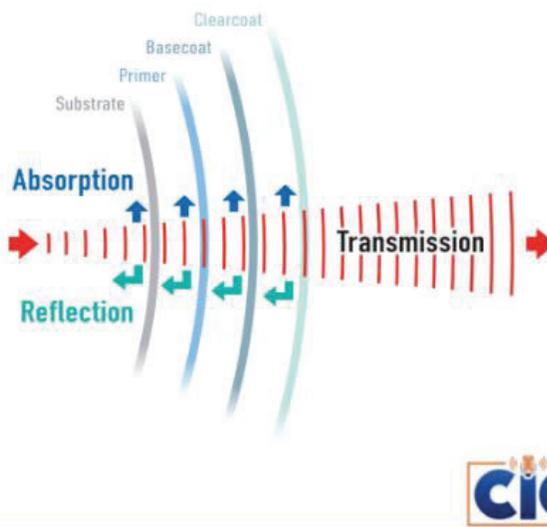
Jeff Wildman, BASF, automotive refinish coatings automotive aftermarket expert, said sensors can be behind painted bumpers, emblems, inside the grille, and many other places around the car.

Front radars are often used for adaptive cruise control and autonomous emergency braking (AEB), he said. Corner radars can be used for blind spot detection, lane-change assist, front cross-traffic alerts, and rear cross-traffic alerts.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has pushed for more safety features from manufacturers in recent year, including proposed mandates.

Wildman said thousands of standard colors cause reflections impacting radars' ability to transmit. These color restrictions change for each manufacturer, make, and model.

“The radar goes through the bumper, the primer, the clear coat, and the color,” Wildman said. “Every single one of those substrates can reflect.”



Bumper material, thickness, and geometry can impact refinish primers, color, and clears coats, he said.

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“We have worked really closely with the OEMs to understand those specifications and measurements and what each layer does and how it impacts those radars,” Wildman said.

This includes spraying out panels and sending them to OEMs to be tested to learn the best procedure needed for each repair, he said.

“If it says two coats of base coat and not a third coat, don’t spray a third coat because you have some paint left,” Wildman said. “When it says a 10 sealer, use a 10 sealer.”

Wildman said anyone using BASF mixing tools will receive warnings throughout about checking and adhering to OEM repair procedures and recommendations.

Blueprinting, or repair planning, can help repairers plan ahead for refinishing projects involving sensors, Wildman said. The process can provide repairers with a comprehensive document that gives actual costs to repair the damaged vehicle based on available manufacturer documents before the repair starts.

Andrew Batenhorst, Pacific BMW collision center manager, elaborated how his shop has developed a repair planning process to account for color identification and information gathering to help avoid timely or costly missteps.

BMW offers clear standards for refinishing near sensor technology, he said. This includes a flow chart that instructs repairers to follow one of three process conclusions.

Those processes include:

- Process A is for minor repairs only. It states no sand through as primer and base in the radar beam area is not permitted. It also says only apply clear coat evenly over the entire bumper.
- Process B allows for refinishing of the entire bumper with an even coating of base or clear coat. No primer or repair is allowed in the radar beam area.
- Process C requires the replacement of the bumper.

“More often than not, I am seeing Process C where we are replacing bumpers,” Batenhorst said.

BMW also repeatedly warns of any issues during the refinishing process, Batenhorst said.

The refinishing standards from BMW are a part of the comprehensive repair plans made at the beginning of any project, he said. Repairer planners also take time to go through specific color verification tasks.

Without a plan, errors can happen that force a job to be redone or force the purchase of an unnecessary part. Ultimately, a mistake can delay a job, he said.

“We are not perfect by any means,” Batenhorst said. “We’ve made mistakes like this in the past that have been very painful. We’ve learned quickly.”

Planning also helps identify each task repairers must do in the process. This makes the job goals more clear for employees, he said.

Source: www.RepairerDrivenNews.com

Article by *Teresa Moss*

TechForce: Amount of students graduating from tech schools is increasing



The amount of students graduating from technical schools has increased for the first time in a decade, according to a new report.

TechForce Foundation's recently-released Technician Supply & Demand report found that student completions in all segments, including collision repair, are up.

"This is wonderful news," said Jennifer Maher, TechForce Foundation's CEO. "[We and our] donors have worked tirelessly to dispel the outdated stigmas; to share the upside and advantages that a technician career offers; to show respect for techs and their vital role in keeping America moving; and help-

ing young people who love problem-solving, technology, and working with their hands to find an education and career that fits. When we see an uptick in program completions, we have faith that the hard work is paying off."

According to the report, collision technician completions rose more than 5% last year with an increase of 238 graduates. Although last year's 4,725 completions were higher than 2021's 4,487 graduates, it was 45% still lower than 2013's 7,469 figure.

The report also found that the amount of overall auto collision technicians was up .5% in 2022 with an increase of 800 collision repair technicians. The rise followed a six-year-long downward slide.

"While this is not a significant increase, it is certainly encouraging," the report said. "...The two most important measurements we have available to us are the total number of technicians employed and the number of postsecondary completions in transportation technical programs," it said. "These are the measurements that represent where we, as an industry, can make our greatest impact through our combined efforts in actively championing technical careers. "While technician demand is certainly an important metric, we have no control over it. ...Therefore, it is most encouraging to see the current trends that are developing, as shown in this year's report."

TechForce added that its work is not over and that it must continue working to meet the need for 110,000 collision technicians through 2027 by:

- Engaging with students, beginning in middle school, as well as parents at school stakeholders to increase awareness of technical career paths;
- Building relationships with local school instructors and administrators;
- Providing funding for technical training scholarships;
- Pushing enrollment in post-secondary training programs;
- Utilizing internships, mentorships, and apprenticeships; and
- Supporting nonprofit organizations that are working to address the tech shortage.

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TechForce said this year's report was significant because it found that the transportation technician workforce increased 4.3% year-over-year in 2022, outpacing U.S. Labor Force growth for the first time.

While noting that the figures are good news, TechForce noted that 795,000 new automotive, diesel, collision repair, aviation, and avionics technicians are still needed to meet demand through 2027. That figure is down from the 1 million new hires deemed necessary to fill the gap in last year's TechForce report.

"The decrease in open positions is certainly encouraging, as well as the increase in both technicians employed and postsecondary technical program graduates," said Greg Settle, report author and TechForce's director emeritus of national initiatives. "Hopefully, the past year's trend of increased graduates continues, as we still have many more open positions than graduates ready to join the workforce. Collision Repair has the biggest challenge ahead with 6.7 jobs available for every graduate, followed by 3.1 for Diesel, 2.6 for Automotive and 1.2 in Aviation."

TechForce Foundation is a nonprofit organization that conducts research on the automotive, collision, and diesel repair industries and links students with employers through education, apprenticeship, and job opportunities. Its efforts include grant and/or scholarship-funded tuition and grant and scholarship money for schools as well as collaborations with businesses, schools, associations, and nonprofits on workforce development solutions.

Earlier this year, it launched a new technical education campaign called "Grab the Wheel" to attract entry-level automotive, collision, and diesel repair technicians into the industries over the next five years to meet the looming workforce demand. "We need to do everything we can to inspire and support those who want to pursue the technician career path," Maher said. "Too often, students either don't start or have to drop out of their technical education because of financial barriers. TechForce will award \$2.3 million in scholarships and grants this year alone, but that's still only serving 1 in every 3 applicants. We simply need more donations to help these students get where they're trying to go, which is employment in an industry that desperately needs them."

In July, I-CAR shared its plans for helping recruit more talent into the collision repair industry during a Collision Industry Conference (CIC) meeting.

Dara Goroff, I-CAR's vice president of planning and industry talent programming, said strategies aimed at bridging the industry's talent gap have come a long way in the past year, with the newly launched Collision Careers marketing campaign poised to further bolster interest.

"Our industry is most sustainable, not just when we have a host of fantastic technicians that work with us every day at our repair centers, but when we have a really eager population across the United States and in other countries who want to join the collision repair industry," Goroff said at the time.

Source: www.RepairerDrivenNews.com Article by Michelle Thompson



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