

The best way to avoid auto repair rip-offs is to be prepared. Knowing how your vehicle works and how to identify common car problems is a good beginning. It is also important to know how to select a good technician, the kinds of questions to ask, and your consumer rights.

Repair Information

In Wisconsin, motor vehicle repairs are governed by Wis. Admin. Code ch. ATCP 132. The law includes businesses that install or repair accessories, such as stereos, and covers shops that rebuild parts.

Choosing a repair shop

- Ask for recommendations from friends, family, and other people you trust.
- Look for an auto repair shop before you need one to avoid being rushed into a last-minute decision.
- Shop around by telephone for the best deal and compare warranty policies on repairs.
- Contact DATCP’s Bureau of Consumer Protection to see if there is a record of complaints about a specific repair shop.
- Look at online reviews for the company. Make sure the shop will honor your vehicle’s warranty.

Repair charges and service terms

Wisconsin car repair shops must get your authorization for any repair and must offer you an estimate, or firm price quote, if repairs will cost \$50 or more.

- No unauthorized repairs are allowed. But if you drop off your car before the shop opens with a note to repair something – and you do not ask them to call you with an estimate – the shop can charge what it wants.
- No unauthorized price increases are allowed. If a shop provides an estimate or quote, they need your permission to increase the price.

- A shop may hold your vehicle until you pay for authorized repairs. However, once you have paid for authorized repairs, the shop cannot keep your vehicle because you refused to pay for unauthorized repairs.
- When requesting additional authorization, the shop must tell you both the cost for the additional repairs and the new total cost of the complete job. Make sure you leave a telephone number where the shop can reach you.
- If a shop accepts a prepayment of \$250 or more, the shop cannot start any repairs until they provide an oral or written estimate of the repair completion date and include that estimate on the repair order. If the shop fails to do this, the estimated completion date will be the same date as the motor vehicle or part is delivered to the shop for repair.
- The shop must return replaced parts to you if you ask for them before repair begins. Warranty parts or parts exchanged for rebuilding need not be returned but must be made available to you for inspection.
- When work is completed, the shop must provide you with an invoice describing the repairs, replaced parts (specifying if used or rebuilt), and warranties for repairs and parts.
- If you need expensive or complicated repairs, or if you have questions about their recommended repairs, consider getting a second opinion.
- Shops that do only diagnostic work and do not sell parts or repairs may be able to give you an objective opinion about which repairs are necessary.
- **Double Damages** – If the vehicle repair law is violated, you may be able to start an action in Small Claims Court. Wis. Stat. § 100.20(5) enables consumers to recover twice the amount of any monetary damages, court costs, and reasonable attorney fees.

After the work is done

- The shop must provide you with an invoice describing the work done. The invoice should list each repair, parts replaced and the cost of each part, labor charges, the odometer reading when you brought the vehicle in, and the date the vehicle was returned to you.
- The shop must also return parts if you requested them before the repairs begin. If the shop needs to return a part under a warranty, the shop must allow you to inspect the parts before your vehicle is returned.

Warranty & service contracts

Warranties – There is no “standard warranty” on repairs. Make sure you understand what is covered under your warranty and get it in writing. Be aware that warranties may be subject to limitations, including time, mileage, deductibles, businesses authorized to perform warranty work, or special procedures required to obtain reimbursement.

Service Contracts – Many vehicle dealers and others sell optional service contracts issued by vehicle manufacturers or independent companies. Not all service contracts are the same; prices vary and usually are negotiable. To help decide whether to purchase a service contract, consider:

- The cost.
- The repairs to be covered.
- Whether coverage from the service contract overlaps coverage provided by any other warranty.
- The deductible.
- Where the repairs are to be performed.
- Required procedures to file a claim, such as prior authorization for specific repairs or meeting required vehicle maintenance schedules.
- Whether repair costs are paid directly by the company to the repair shop or whether you will have to pay first and get reimbursed.

- The reputation of the service contract company. Contact DATCP’s Consumer Protection Hotline to check for complaints against a business: (800) 422-7128 or DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov.

Resolving a dispute

- Document all transactions, as well as your experiences, with dates, times, expenses, and the names of people you dealt with.
- Talk to the shop manager or owner first. If that does not work, contact DATCP’s Bureau of Consumer Protection. Another option is to file a claim in a small claims court. You do not need an attorney to do this.

Repair Shop Prohibited Practices

(Wis. Admin. Code ch. ATCP 132.09)

Shops cannot do any of the following:

- Knowingly underestimate the price of repairs or the time required to complete the repairs.
- Misrepresent any of the following:
 - That certain repairs are necessary for the safety or effective operation of a vehicle.
 - That a motor vehicle is in a dangerous condition.
 - That failure to repair the vehicle will be harmful to the vehicle.
 - That a repair has been made.
 - The terms of a warranty or service agreement.
- Fail or refuse to return your vehicle if you decline to pay for unauthorized repairs or charges that exceed the estimate or firm price quotation.
- Intentionally alter a vehicle to create a condition requiring repairs.
- Make any repair or warranty advertisement that is untrue, deceptive, or misleading.
- Fail to honor any warranty or service agreement to which the shop is a party.

- Demand payment for unauthorized repairs, or for repairs that have not been completed.
- Charge, or threaten to charge, for preparing a repair estimate or fixed price quote unless the charge constitutes reasonable compensation for preliminary diagnostic work required to provide an accurate estimate; and if the shop representative discloses the charge, or the rate at which the charge will be computed, prior to starting any diagnostic work.
- Falsify or destroy any document or record required to be produced or retained by law.
- Refuse to perform repairs unless you agree to waive any right provided by ATCP 132.

For more information visit our website or contact:

Wisconsin Department of Agriculture,
Trade and Consumer Protection
Bureau of Consumer Protection
2811 Agriculture Drive
PO Box 8911
Madison, WI 53708-8911

Email: DATCPHotline@wi.gov

Website: datcp.wi.gov

Phone: (800) 422-7128

TTY: Dial 711 or (800) 947-3529 before calling
DATCP



USE THIS QR CODE TO
FILE A COMPLAINT

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Bureau of Consumer Protection

Motor Vehicle Repair Tips

