

Auto Safety Report

Replacing Your Airbag: Tips You Can Live With

(NAPSA)—Federal regulations require both driver and front passenger airbags as standard equipment on all passenger cars and light trucks. For enhanced passenger safety, vehicle manufacturers have also been installing airbags that help protect passengers in certain side impact collisions. Even airbags that deploy from the carpet to help protect passengers' feet have been developed.

There's much more to airbags than just a bunch of air.

As more airbag-equipped vehicles appear on the roads, and with an estimated 37.7 million auto accidents occurring each year (12.8 million damaged vehicles will be repaired), the need for proper airbag replacement practices becomes critical. Unfortunately, alternative sources for replacement parts have sprung up. Salvage and stolen airbags are finding their way into some repaired vehicles causing a wave of concern to vehicle manufacturers.

The Big Picture

"What's important to remember is that an airbag system is designed specifically for each vehicle model," said Susan Reil Johnson, Collision Repair Product Team manager, Ford Customer Service Division. "The system must be repaired with the correct parts to function properly," Reil Johnson added.

Even subtle design changes over several model years may require airbag system alterations. To ensure the highest-quality collision repair and proper functioning of airbag systems, vehicle owners should be aware of the following steps needed to safely repair or replace components of



the airbag system:

Questions to Ask Your Collision Repairer

If the airbag did deploy, where will the replacement airbag and components come from?

Vehicle manufacturers and most insurance companies recommend that only new original equipment manufacturer (OEM) airbag modules and components be installed in the event of an airbag deployment. New OEM airbag components can only be purchased from a vehicle manufacturer's authorized dealer.

There are numerous companies promoting overruns and blemished airbags for sale. It is questionable where these airbags are coming from since only original vehicle manufacturers make and distribute new airbags.

May I see the airbag sales documentation?

Always ask for sales documentation for the airbag module and components. A legitimate collision repair facility will be able to supply this information. This documentation should show the authorized dealership that supplied the items.

Consumers should also com-

plete and return the information card that is enclosed with every replacement airbag. Since every airbag installed in a new vehicle carries the vehicle identification number (VIN), this card serves as a record that the airbag was replaced.

Is the new driver-side airbag module cover the correct color?

New genuine Ford replacement airbag modules must be the correct color. **They cannot be painted.** The paint could degrade the cover materials and interfere with airbag deployment.

Now that the airbag module and components have been properly addressed, another crucial component of a safe and proper collision repair involves the type of replacement "crash parts" installed.

Testing by a variety of manufacturers and independent firms consistently confirms that OEM crash parts clearly outperform non-OEM crash parts in all critical quality areas, including fit, finish, structural integrity, corrosion protection and dent resistance. Also, OEM crash parts are the same as those installed on new vehicles, which meet all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS). Significant questions remain unanswered about the quality, durability and safety of non-OEM crash parts.

While the choice is yours, if you don't get involved in the decision-making process before repairs actually begin, your parts preferences may not be considered. Following these tips will help protect your vehicle investment and help ensure a satisfying and safe collision repair.