

The Basics of Property Damage Claims in an Auto Accident

Ok. You've been in a car accident. Your car is damaged, but you do not know how much. The following will detail what's going to happen next.

An insurance adjuster will arrange to have your car looked at. Each insurance company handles the estimate process differently and depending on your situation, one of the following will happen:

If your vehicle is drivable, an adjuster may come to your home, schedule an appointment for you to take your vehicle into a repair shop, or have you submit photos and estimates to their office for review.

If your vehicle is NOT drivable, a field appraiser may go to where your car was towed or stored to get an estimate, or they may request to have your car towed to a repair shop for them to provide a thorough inspection/estimate.

Based on the outcome of the inspection/estimation process, an adjuster will decide whether your vehicle is either 1) repairable or 2) a total loss.

TOTAL LOSS: Depending on the auto insurance company, if repairs to your vehicle are 65-75% of its market value, the insurance company will deem your vehicle a "total loss" and pay you the fair market value of your vehicle.

- **TOTAL LOSS = NO RENTAL CAR!**
 - When another person is at fault for your accident, their insurance will pay for your rental car. Typically, they will cover a certain amount per day. If your vehicle is deemed a "total loss", the insurance company will stop paying for your rental once they make you a fair market value offer.
- REPAIRABLE: If your vehicle is deemed repairable, a few things will happen. It is important to pay attention to what happens next to make sure you are not taken advantage of by the insurance company.
 - ESTIMATE
 - After inspecting your vehicle, an insurance adjuster will give you an estimate on how much the insurance company thinks it will cost to adequately repair your vehicle.
 - **GET YOUR OWN ESTIMATE!**
 - Most times, an adjuster will not take into account any estimate you have gotten, but it will be helpful in benchmarking the adjuster's estimate.
 - **ADJUSTERS DON'T CATCH EVERYTHING!**
 - Sometimes, adjusters will miss something that needs repairing. Once you take your car in to get fixed, the shop of your choice will perform a closer inspection of your car and if the adjuster

missed anything, the shop will update the adjuster's estimate.

○ REPAIR

- After giving you an estimate, an insurance adjuster will give you a list of "preferred" repair shops to take your vehicle in to get fixed.
- **YOU DON'T HAVE TO USE THEIR SHOPS!**
Insurance companies have existing deals with certain shops that charge them lower rates in exchange for giving the repair shops business. Take your vehicle to a repair shop of your choice and insist you repair your car there.
- **GET THE REPAIR PROCESS GOING QUICKLY!**
If the insurance company is paying for your rental vehicle, be sure to arrange to have your car fixed as soon as possible. Sometimes, if the insurance company feels you are taking too long, they will stop paying for your rental.
- **MAKE SURE THE MECHANICS USE FACTORY PARTS!**
Sometimes to save money, repair shops and insurance companies will use off-brand, after-market parts to fix your car. These parts are usually not as high in quality as factory parts and you could experience problems later on. This is especially important if your vehicle is leased. However, if your car is older, original factory parts may not be available for your vehicle.