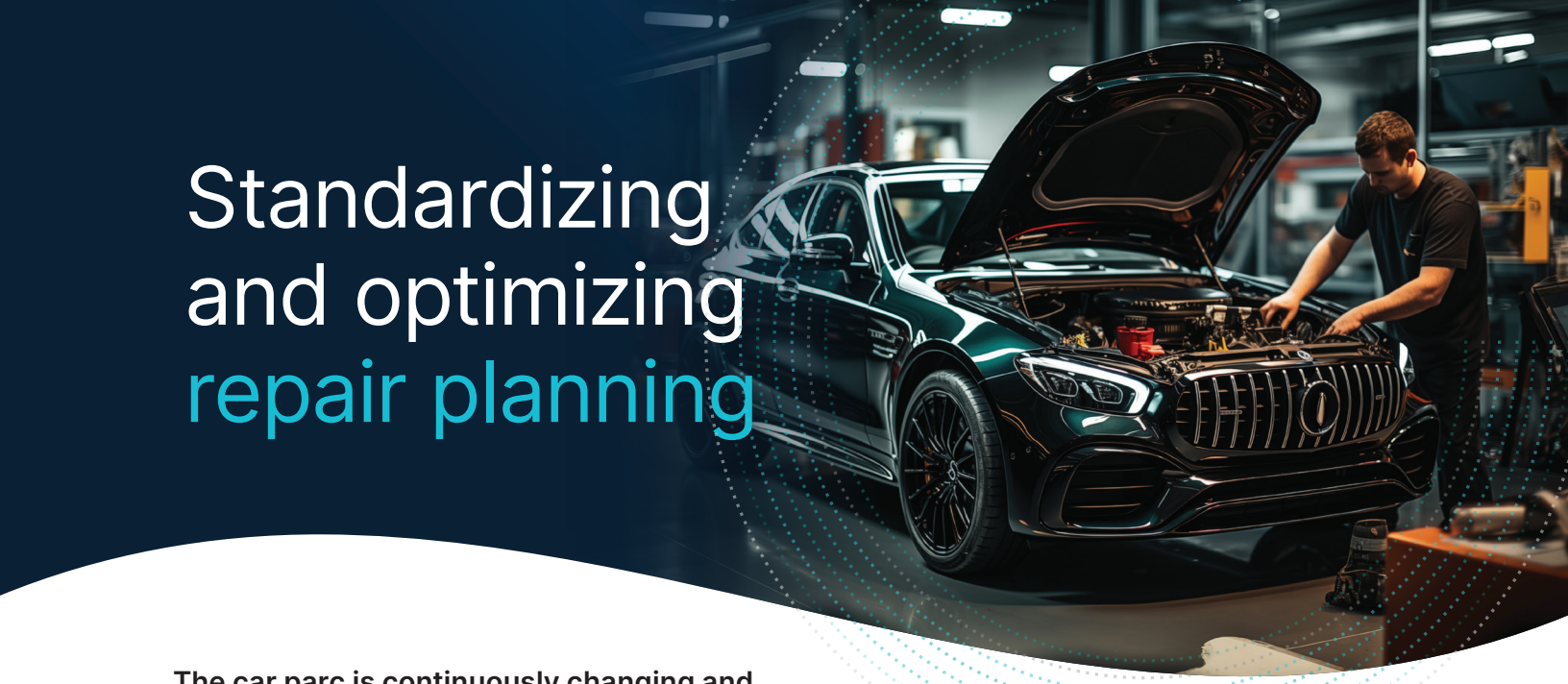
Standardizing and optimizing repair planning



The car parc is continuously changing and becoming more complex, requiring additional labor input, research, and planning.

This leads to inefficiencies in current repair planning practices and increased supplements, resulting in a loss of 39 million man-days. That's roughly equivalent to 1,337 individual lifetimes and about $1.5 billion in lost productivity – all in one year. This creates a lot of wasted time and, from the perspective of your bottom line, lost profits.

Today's vehicles are equipped with sophisticated systems and components that require up-to-date tools and knowledge of repair procedures, a trend that's only going to continue. From advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) to complex hybrid and electric drivetrains, vehicles demand a higher level of expertise for repairs to be completed safely and properly. This underscores the importance of standardizing a repair planning process and putting technicians in the position to make consistent, efficient, and quality repairs.

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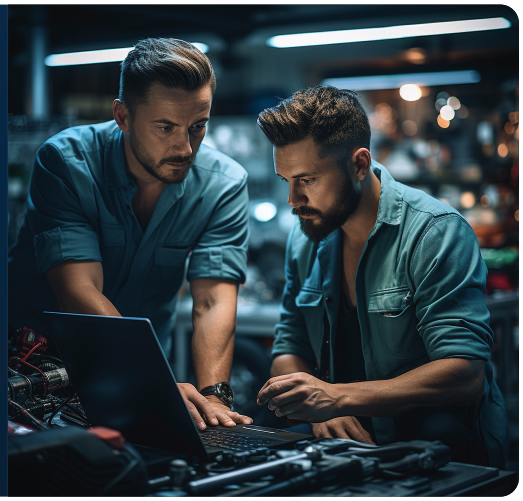

Breaking down the repair planning process

Standardizing and optimizing repair planning allows your collision repair facility to adapt to evolving vehicle technology and promotes consistent, efficient, high-quality repairs. Using a structured approach to repair planning helps enhance operational efficiency, employee productivity, and overall customer satisfaction. What's more, repair planning removes barriers, improves collaboration, increases data access, and promotes accountability.

These advancements not only benefit individual repair facilities, but also contribute to the broader goal of standardizing repair planning across the industry, ultimately leading to safer, more reliable vehicle repairs for consumers.

Check out the following steps for implementing and optimizing a repair planning practice:

1. Customer check-in

The first step in your repair planning process should be to perform an active intake. This means walking the customer around the vehicle, identifying pre-existing damage, and collecting the collision details. This should always include written documentation and quality photos.

This check-in is your opportunity to 'wow' your customers. You also have a chance to learn the details of the collision from the vehicle owner first hand. Set expectations by giving clear information about what's happening with their repair. Customers should understand when you're going to reach out and how (text, email, phone calls, etc.), the complexity of their repair, and the approximate number of days you'll have the vehicle.

It's important to keep in mind, however, that every intake is different. Think about how you might adjust your wording and approach when speaking to customers with EVs or hybrid vehicles. What additional information do they need? When speaking to the customer, it's important to break it down for them and ask, "do you have any questions about what we're doing?"

The check-in is your opportunity to 'wow' your customers, setting expectations & providing clear information.

2. Pre-disassembly

Before any disassembly takes place, several steps need to be performed consistently. The first step is to wash the vehicle thoroughly. Thorough means cleaning mechanical components, the underbody, anything that could create uncertainty in the pre-diagnostic inspection process. The first part of the pre-diagnostic process is scanning. This is where the vehicle is inspected for prior repairs, and all damage is mapped and documented, including photo documentation. This aids in accurately assessing the extent of the damage and serves as a valuable reference throughout the repair process.

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3. Disassembly

Disassembly is where the rubber meets the road. You've probably heard different perspectives on what 100% disassembly means. Here's what industry experts recommend: **any part that requires removal or disassembly for repair should be addressed during this stage.** This includes damaged wheels, fenders, doors, bumper covers, and grills—each should be fully disassembled for repair or replacement. Label the damaged parts clearly as "scrap" or "waste" to prevent them from being mistakenly reused.

During disassembly, it's important to be methodical and consistent with your approach. Even seemingly straightforward tasks like bumper replacements require careful consideration of safety aspects, such as reinforcements, sensors, and identifying single-use parts. Newer vehicles often have clips, fasteners, and other pieces of hardware that can break during a collision or in disassembly. These small parts are easy to overlook, leading to delays if not ordered in advance.

> **During 100% disassembly, any part that requires removal or disassembly for the repair should be addressed.**

You'll need to separate reusable and replacement parts and organize them neatly for documentation purposes. There are software solutions that can be great tools for single-use part identification, helping facilitate communication between estimators and technicians, and ensuring the repair plan aligns with repair needs.

According to data from an industry-leading software solution,

42%

of repair plans contain at least one single-use part.

Removal and parts storage

During disassembly, you should review the most up-to-date OEM structural and procedural documents to help make decisions (store repair documents in a clear sleeve for easy reference). From there, complete measurements and perform pre-pulls as necessary and determine if a pre-alignment is required. Conduct R&I (remove and install) and triage damaged parts, storing them securely. Use sealable storage containers for clips, fasteners, and hardware. From there, complete any required measurements, pre-pulls, or pre-alignments to help determine both the extent of damage and repair verses replacement decisions. These practices help maintain organization and efficiency during the disassembly process.

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Storing and weather-proofing vehicles

Protecting the vehicle while in the care of the collision center is a top priority. This includes protecting electrical connections from weather, dust, metal shavings, and corrosion. Taking these protective measures is critical to maintaining the vehicle's electrical viability. This can be achieved with indoor storage or by using protective coverings like CrashWrap (some shops even cover plugs and open fittings with balloons). Whatever measures you take to protect the vehicle, it's important to inform the customer and document these measures to build trust with customers and insurers.

4. Estimate accuracy audit

Missed operations on the estimate lead to supplements and profit loss. Your shop can help prevent these issues by ensuring your estimate is accurate and complete the first time. The first step is one that you'll hear again and again: documentation. All procedures must be thoroughly documented to provide a clear outline of the repair process. Next, labor operations without a valid labor time should be identified and addressed.

Then the verification steps, including:

1. **Checking the correct labor profile.**
2. **Confirming accurate coding of labor operations and parts (OEM, AM, LKQ, etc.).**
3. **Verifying parts price differences and availability.**

Additionally, it's important to include consumables in the estimate, the items you use or that get damaged during the repair process (paint, adhesives, etc.). Plus, verify that outsourced repair estimates, towing, and storage are added. Last, but not least, remember to include correct taxes for all taxable items. These steps help your team write a comprehensive estimate that reflects the true cost of the repair, making sure you're getting paid for all your work and the materials used.

Estimating solutions help:

- Reduce supplements
- Maintain compliance
- Improve cycle time

5. Collaboration

Be sure to involve and inform all relevant parties throughout the repair planning process. This leads to more accurate estimates, better decisions, and smoother operations. Key stakeholders include repair technicians, estimators, parts suppliers, insurance adjusters, and the vehicle owner. Or, in short, make sure everyone is on the same page. This includes reviewing required documentation to check that the necessary steps and procedures are followed. Each stakeholder brings unique expertise and perspectives that can help create a comprehensive repair plan and ensure the repair is completed efficiently and effectively, following manufacturer repair procedures.

6. Submissions and approvals

Now it's time to submit the estimate and the repair plan for review and approval by the customer and (in some cases) the insurance company or a third party:

- First, the paperwork must be accurately prepared to maintain compliance with relevant laws and regulations.
- Next, contact the customer and/or insurance company to discuss the repair plan and get approvals.
- Once you have approval, the responsible party needs to agree to cover the costs associated with the repair plan.

Clear communication with customers and insurers during this stage supports a successful and compliant repair process.

7. Parts procurement

You've got approval, now what? Is it the 'hair on fire' approach to parts ordering, having a dealer fax over quotes or spending valuable time waiting on hold while a parts person "checks on it"? Or do you embrace a more efficient approach, using software that promotes more efficient parts ordering, provides real-time availability, and offers price matching?

Online parts ordering streamlines the procurement process, improves cycle time, and reduces errors. Then, once you receive the parts, it's important to mirror match them with the damaged parts and discard the damaged ones properly. Lastly, minimize delays by preparing carts or storage areas to organize the necessary parts for a repair job.

8. Dispatching

This is the part where you assign the right technician to the job to optimize efficiency and deliver quality. Before you choose, ask yourself, 'Does this team member have the appropriate skill set and workload?' It's also important to consider, before starting the repair, the vehicle's placement in the shop's production system. Is the vehicle in the correct location to carry out the repair process? If not, make the proper adjustments to promote a smooth repair process, reduce downtime, and help your team get the repairs done efficiently.

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9. In process & final QC

Quality control is critical throughout the repair process, ensuring the vehicle has been repaired according to manufacturer procedures. This helps you avoid expensive rework and meet (or exceed) customer expectations. This includes performing in-process quality control (QC) checks before advancing the repair process. Once the repair is complete, a final QC check should be conducted to verify that all the work is correct and meets quality standards.

At this point, it's also important to check that the necessary paperwork is in order and ready for review by performing a file audit. This step is essential for invoicing and maintaining accurate records prior to returning the vehicle to the customer.

What's next?

As you navigate repair planning and look to standardize and optimize the process, keep in mind that you should approach change strategically and incrementally to minimize disruptions. This is where you can take advantage of comprehensive solutions that encompass all aspects of repair planning. These solutions coupled with guidance from expert coaches and consultants provide ongoing learning and adaptation – all key to implementing a standardized (and optimized!) repair planning process.

Give yourself a competitive edge with OEM certification programs and gain access to tools, knowledge, and resources to support your facility's growth.

The benefits of certifications include:

- Enhancing repair quality
- Optimizing estimatics
- Preserving vehicle integrity
- Ensuring structural repair integrity
- Adhering to OEM repair procedures

These practices also help improve job profitability and enhance repair outcomes without causing significant disruptions to your operations.

Questions? We're happy to help! Click here to connect with an expert or to learn about all of the OEC Collision Shop Solutions.