

# Insurance Claims Guide

**We understand all too well just how valuable your car, your time and your financial resources are to you.**

Having been through numerous storm events has given us some unique experiences in working with customers who are rightfully upset that their new car has just been pummeled with hail. Several questions usually come to mind and this guide is designed to help you navigate that process.

- How do I file a claim?
- Does my policy cover this type of damage?
- Will this claim raise my rates?
- Where can I get my vehicle repaired?
- Do I have a choice as to who will repair my vehicle?
- Do I have to pay my deductible?

## Filing a Claim

It is important to know what your rights are as the insured, and to know what to expect when your claim is processed. When you contact your agent after a hail event, **they will issue you a claim number.** The claim number is associated with the loss report documentation that will help ensure the claim is processed in a timely, accurate manner

They will ask you certain questions such as the location where your vehicle encountered the storm and the date it occurred.

Your auto insurance policy typically covers damage caused by hailstones to your car. **Hail damage is classified as a comprehensive claim,** not a collision claim. If you have comprehensive coverage, you are covered. Comprehensive insurance covers such things as theft, vandalism and even run-ins with animals so adding it to your insurance policy could save you a lot of money.

Whatever deductible level you have chosen on your policy for comprehensive coverage is the amount of the claim you pay out of pocket. Your insurer pays the rest of the claim amount. Generally, when your claim is initially written by the adjuster, they will cut you a check for their estimate less your deductible.

Hail damage is considered an act of God or Nature by most insurance companies, and does not affect your future rates. However, if your vehicle gets hail-damaged repeatedly, these claims may affect your premiums later. Ask your insurance company for their policies regarding this. Also, keep in mind that living in an area prone to excessive hail damage such as the Colorado front range may force insurers to raise their rates for everyone across the board so you may as well take advantage of what you are paying for.

## The Inspection Process

After you have filed your claim, the insurance company will arrange to look at your car. They may come to your home or work to look at the vehicle or direct you to a CAT (Catastrophic Claims Center) for an inspection. CAT sites are generally used to handle excessive numbers of claims and you may be required to have your vehicle inspected there.

It is important to have your vehicle looked at inside, or in a shaded area, if possible.

**Estimating a vehicle outside is a very inaccurate way to assess hail damage, as many of the dents will not be seen due to the glare of the sun.**

When your adjustor determines the severity of your hail damage, they will write the estimate to be repaired one of two ways, or a combination on the two. The Paintless Dent Removal method [PDR] involves a skilled technician gently massaging your dents out from the underside of the body panel. The traditional body shop method requires that the dents are straightened, filled, and the body panels repainted. Sometimes the damage is so severe that the panels will need to be replaced. Edges of panels such as the hood should be reviewed carefully for cracked paint from hail impacts.

You can notify the insurance company as to the repair shop you are going to use for the repairs.

**Dents By Hand can handle the claim from start to finish.** We make the process very easy for the insurance adjusters to come to our shop and review the documentation we provide with our estimate.

## The Initial Estimate

These estimates typically come in at around half the actual cost of repairs. Receiving an accurate estimate from Dents By Hand before your adjuster inspects your vehicle is the most efficient method to save you time and ensure a quicker turn around for your repairs.

Some shops will want to see your vehicle before they schedule in your repair; they may want to ensure the insurance estimate was written accurately or to determine if panels need replacement.

The shop will then notify the insurance company if they feel the estimate is written for the wrong type of repair or written light. You do not have to get involved with this process in most cases. The repair shop will then re-write the estimate or create a supplement for the insurance company to approve.

## The Supplement Process

The supplement process is carried out in a way that documents the hail damage most accurately. We use water based Posca markers to highlight the dents we can see under our PDR lights. This allows us a way to send photos to the insurance company for their records and for them to determine if an adjuster needs to be dispatched for re-inspection. This process can take some extra time depending upon the number of

claims after a hail event or the availability of claims adjusters to process those additional inspections.

The best way to reduce down time is for us to have the vehicle at our shop before the adjuster is scheduled to look at your car. We can then provide them with the ideal conditions and lighting to see all the dents and begin repairs immediately once everything is approved.

## The Repair Process

If possible, the paintless method is recommended so that your original factory finish can be preserved and your vehicle can be returned to you fully repaired in a timely manner. **PDR repairs generally take 1-3 days to complete once the supplement is approved.** Traditional repairs usually take 2 - 4 weeks.

When the damage is too severe and requires traditional auto body in addition to PDR, the paintless dent repairs are done first and then items such as replacement hoods are painted. This helps to ensure any dents that could not be fully repaired with PDR alone can then be addressed by the body shop technicians.

After your vehicle is repaired, you will pay your applicable deductible and pick up your vehicle. It is important that you inspect your vehicle thoroughly to see if the repairs were completed to your satisfaction. **If anything seems questionable ask to inspect your vehicle inside under PDR lighting. The sunlight can hide poor PDR repairs.**

## About your Deductible

**Often after a hail storm you may see advertising from hail chaser type companies offering no deductible repairs or zero cost out of pocket. Another tactic is to say they are paying your insurance deductible. The insurance company does not collect deductibles! They only leave that portion out of the claim once they issue payment.**

**It may sound like a good deal but there a few things you should know before you commit to one of these companies. They are basically asking you to commit fraud on their behalf!**

Recently we contacted DORA to better verify what a consumer should be aware of when dealing with these situations. This was their response:

### **Department of Regulatory Agency (DORA) & Deductible Waivers**

*The Colorado Division of Insurance (DOI) regulates the insurance industry in Colorado. They help consumers by answering their questions, investigating their complaints, and helping them to understand their insurance. They regulate and monitor the insurance companies in Colorado, as well as insurance agents, making sure everyone is following the law.*

*According to DORA there is no specific law in Colorado that states: a repair facility cannot give a Waiver of Deductible. However; deductible waivers violate the*

*consumer's contract that they signed with their insurance company that they are responsible for paying their deductible. DORA explained, this action is a form of consumer fraud.*

In general, when it comes to car insurance, you should expect to pay some kind of deductible when you get repair work done. After all, paying a deductible is what you agreed to when you signed your policy. Talk to your insurance agent to get a better idea of what you will owe when it comes time to do repairs.

**We at Dents By Hand have helped hundreds of customers over the years and we understand that financial resources are valuable to a consumer.** There are legitimate / legal ways to assist someone with their repair costs in a way that does not put them in a situation where their insurance company will not stand behind them should something go wrong and they had not paid their deductible. **When everything is handled properly you remain in good standing with your insurance company and the you are happy with the repairs!**

## **A Word About Steering**

*This portion brought to your courtesy of [www.napdrt.org](http://www.napdrt.org)*

When talking to your claims representative, it is a very common practice for them to attempt to steer you to their preferred body shop to have the repairs done. Steering is illegal in most states; however, it is still a common practice. Do not be intimidated or coerced into taking your vehicle somewhere just because the insurance company wants you to use a particular shop. **By law, you have the right to have your vehicle repaired by the repairer of your choice.**

Insurance companies have agreements with body shops known as DRP's (Direct Repair Providers). A DRP is an agreement between the body shop and an insurance company that usually means that the body shop agrees to price concessions for the insurance company. In exchange, the body shop is led to believe that more claims will be sent their way because they agreed to lower their prices for the insurance company.

As a consumer, you need to think clearly as to what this issue means for you. Do you really want your vehicle repaired by a body shop that agrees to fix it cheaper to get more work for them? Is a cheaper repair a quality repair? Not usually. Don't fall victim to this game. If you don't know a quality body shop, ask around and get recommendations from other consumers.

Some insurance companies will take this steering practice up a notch by intimidating you into thinking that they will not guarantee the repair if you have the car repaired by someone other than their list of preferred shops. This is not true. Each body shop guarantees their own repairs, not the insurance company.

Some insurers might tell you that if you take your car to the body shop of your choice, you might have to pay the difference if that body shop has higher labor rates than the ones that have DRP agreements with them. Again, this is not true. Your insurer must pay reasonable and customary repair charges from the body shop of your choice.

During a large hailstorm event, some insurance companies set up claims drive-through centers at their preferred body shop. This is where another subtle form of steering can occur. They adjust your claim and then introduce you to the body shop manager who will be happy to schedule your vehicle in on the spot. This puts unfair pressure on you to use this shop.

In light of all these common [and illegal] steering practices, it doesn't make good sense to take your vehicle somewhere because the insurance company says so. Look at it like this: Does the third party (your insurance company) that pays for your claim really have your best interest in mind? Or, are they referring you to this shop so they can save money? As the old adage goes, "You usually get what you pay for."

The intention of this article is not to paint all insurance companies as villains. We are trying to educate you to make informed choices about your vehicle repairs. Don't be unknowingly steered.

**We're ready to guide you through your insurance claim process.  
Call us @ 303.245.9500 to schedule your complimentary consultation.**