

Automotive Repair AND Smog Check News

Fall 2013

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DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS



B:R

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Fluid and Flush Services

The Bureau of Automotive Repair (Bureau) has spent the last year reviewing the marketing and disclosure practices for providing fluid and flush services in the automotive repair industry. After careful review of the practices and communications of automotive repair stations, as well as conducting meetings and workshops with the manufacturers of vehicles and automotive fluids and chemical agents, the Bureau has decided not to pursue a new public awareness campaign at this time. Instead, the Bureau will ensure the materials we currently provide to consumers and the automotive industry contain useful information on fluid and flush services.

Background on Fluid and Flush Services

Automotive technology has improved significantly, and late-model vehicles are lasting longer and require fewer repairs and maintenance. Due to these improvements, vehicle owners are saving on repair costs. However, owners that take their vehicles in for an oil change are commonly approached by repair facility personnel about performing other preventative maintenance services. The Bureau holds that manufacturer maintenance schedules should be a starting point for industry repair and service standards for fluid and flush services.

Any act or omission related to an automotive repair dealer conducting its business to maintain, repair, or service a motor vehicle falls under the provisions of Article 3 of the Automotive Repair Act (Act). This includes any preventative maintenance services, such as fluid and flush services, that the automotive repair dealer may provide.

The fact of the matter is that vehicle manufacturers are experts on preventative maintenance and, although they provide schedules for these services, most consumers are not certain if the services being recommended by their repair facility are required by the manufacturer at that point in time or if they will be of any benefit to them.

Consumers rely on the repair facility for full disclosure when preventative maintenance services such as automatic transmission, power steering unit, radiator, or brake system fluid exchanges or flushes are being recommended.

Over the past few years, the Bureau has seen a significant increase in the marketing of fluid and flush products and services through the media and various social network sites. For this reason, the Bureau, whose highest priority is to protect the public, decided to conduct a review of the solicitation and sale of preventative maintenance services. The primary goal of this review was to research the history of automotive repair and to determine whether or not these services are being solicited and sold by repair facilities with full disclosure to their customers. In others words, are repair technicians being up-front about the need for, or benefits of, the services they are recommending and selling to consumers?

Fluid and Flush Services *(continued from cover)*

Industry Response

Our conversations with manufacturers, the repair industry, and others have convinced us that we were successful in communicating our concerns about how some businesses were selling these products and services. We believe the industry heard our concerns and took them to heart, and have taken meaningful steps to ensure these services and products are sold in compliance with the Act. As a result, the Bureau believes there is no need for additional outreach or regulations at this time.

The Bureau's Ongoing Efforts

Information about consumers' rights relative to automotive repair services, information on the complaint process, and the status on automotive repair dealer licenses will continue to be updated and disseminated to consumers through our public Web site, social network sites, media alerts, and other outreach materials, such as brochures and fact sheets. The Bureau's bottom line message about preventative maintenance services is this:

Consumers: Your owner's manual was written by the manufacturer that built your vehicle. It contains the most accurate description of how to care for your vehicle. Take the time to look it over so you have an idea of what type of preventative maintenance services are recommended by the manufacturer and when they are due, what services are not recommended by the manufacturer, and those that may void any vehicle warranties.

If you are approached about having fluid or flush services done on your vehicle, ask the technician why the service is needed and if the service is recommended by the vehicle manufacturer at this time. All automotive repair dealers have access to required maintenance information on the vehicles they service or repair. If you are still unsure if the service is required or will be of any benefit to you, don't feel pressured to agree to those services until you do some research. If your owner's manual doesn't provide you with an answer, contact others knowledgeable in the industry before making a decision.

In addition, keep good records of services done on your vehicle. These records will help you keep track of preventative maintenance that has already been performed and can assist you in making decisions in the future.

Automotive Repair Industry: BAR does not regulate the products or services you sell; we regulate how you sell them to your customers. Any preventative maintenance services provided to consumers must comply with the provisions of the Act, so be familiar with your responsibilities as an Automotive Repair Dealer under the Act and its regulations. By maintaining compliance with the Act and by following the preventative maintenance services best practices below, you will earn consumer trust, enjoy the business of repeat customers,

and your automotive repair station will remain a proud leader in the industry.

Preventative Maintenance Services Best Practices

- Obtain customer authorization and inspect the vehicle before making service recommendations.
- Openly and honestly communicate with your customers.
- Ask customers about vehicle driving conditions and use.
- Ask customers about driving habits and vehicle maintenance and repair history.
- Communicate maintenance service recommendations made by the vehicle manufacturer.
- If recommending an accelerated maintenance service that deviates from the vehicle manufacturer, explain why.

The Bureau wishes to thank all those who participated in the discussions over the past year on this issue. We understand that our review took us into some interesting areas, such as chemical engineering, product development, equipment manufacturing, and other subjects. While the Bureau appreciated the opportunity to learn more about these topics and their relationship to the automotive repair industry, we also recognize that our role, mandate, and mission lie solely within the repair processes set forth in the Act.

We also recognize that many opinions and views were shared during our review of this issue and want to make it clear that the Bureau does not endorse nor disapprove of any specific products or services available in the marketplace today. For example, our research into brake fluid testing does not reflect BAR support of one technology over another. In many instances, it may be prudent for the automotive repair dealer to perform multiple types of testing to verify whether the brake fluid continues to meet U.S. Department of Transportation standards for which it was certified.

We appreciate your interest and patience in working with us through these issues. The Bureau looks forward to our continuing dialog with the automotive repair industry and other interested parties on areas of mutual interest affecting California consumers. **BAR**

Sincerely,



PATRICK DORAIS, Acting Chief
Bureau of Automotive Repair