

# Bureau reviews auto shops

■ The Better Business Bureau reveals that some local repair shops may need a tune-up

By Lindsay Buchele  
Oregon Daily Emerald

There have been nearly 900 complaints made against auto repair businesses in Oregon so far this year, according to the Better Business Bureau. BBB spokeswoman Angela McCrea said there are 101 of these businesses that currently have unsatisfactory ratings with the organization, and this includes businesses in Eugene.

"Consumers are reporting that auto repair shops are not honoring their warranties or will fix something on a car that is not authorized," McCrea said.

She said there are things consumers can do to ensure they receive quality service and ways to make a business responsible when it doesn't provide this service, including checking the status of the business with the BBB.

When a consumer files a complaint against a company through the organization, the company must respond to the complaint if it wishes to maintain a satisfactory BBB standing, she said.

It only takes one unanswered complaint to ruin a business's standing, and at least one shop in Eugene has an unsatisfactory standing with BBB.

A business owner can almost ensure a good standing by becoming a member of the BBB. To do this, however, 14 standards must be met, McCrea said. These include responding to all complaints, not having a large volume of complaints filed and operating with ethics and standards.

"There is a certain amount of trust that goes along with being a member of the Better Business Bureau," McCrea said. "If someone wants to know if a business is reliable, they can find out through us."

Whether a business is a member of the BBB or not, the Bureau can

## Consumer automotive strategy

One of the best ways people can protect themselves against disreputable car repair shop scams is to practice 'consumer automotive strategy.'

**Be quiet about your lack of knowledge.** If you don't know much about cars, do not let the mechanic know.

**Be aware of common scams** used by dishonest repair shops. There are many things disreputable mechanics can do to make a car appear to have more problems than it does.

If you feel you have not been dealt with fairly or have been taken advantage of, you should first complain to the service manager of the repair shop or the owner of the facility.

If you cannot resolve the complaint satisfactorily, contact the local Better Business Bureau where your car was serviced for assistance, the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) division of the Council of Better Business Bureaus, your consumer protection office or the state's attorney general's office.

SOURCE: The Better Business Bureau

still process complaints made against a company and record them for the public's knowledge.

Another way for the public to check the reliability of a business or to file a complaint is through the Eugene Chamber of Commerce; however, if the business is not a member of the chamber, there is no guarantee any information will be available or that a complaint will be handled, said spokeswoman Dina Fartier.

"We will take complaints in writing, but if the business is a chamber member, there is nothing that can be done," Fartier said. "I do record all of the complaints, so people can still find out about nonmembers."

Dan Bryan Automotive Repair Ltd., which is a member of both the chamber and the BBB, has been serving Eugene for four years and currently has a satisfactory standing, said co-owner Carol Bryan.

She said she has seen people who have been taken advantage of by other shops.

"I see a lot of single women who feel they have been taken advantage of," Bryan said. "They end up with parts that weren't needed or their cars not being fixed right the first time."

She also said it's hard to tell when a business will provide quality service.

"The best advertising is always word of mouth; that's how you can tell if a business is good or bad,"

Bryan said.

Steve Romania, owner of the Romania Toyota, Hyundai, Subaru and Chevrolet dealerships and service stations in Eugene, said checking out a business and following some guidelines can keep consumers from being taken advantage of.

First, he said, consumers must insist they receive a free written estimate for parts and labor. Second, expect to pay for a diagnostic exam of the car if the problem is unknown. Romania said mechanics are usually paid by the hour and performing a diagnostic test is factored into a labor cost. Other things should not be paid for, he said.

"It's a good idea to set a 'not-to-exceed' limit on how much you will pay for service," Romania, whose business has a satisfactory standing with the BBB, said. "If they exceed this amount, don't pay for it. The shop should get authorization from you if any further repairs are going to be made."

Joe Allen, of Dave Allen Automotive, said consumers should also look for mechanics who are certified under the Automotive Service Excellence, a certification process that tests mechanics every few years to ensure their knowledge.

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# University health benefits to decline

■ Rising insurance prices charged by health insurance companies will result in fewer choices for University employees

Marty Toohey  
for the Emerald

Like the rest of the University faculty, University English professor Louise Westling could choose from several health care packages during the last several years. Although Westling always chose a comprehensive package, many University employees chose a basic package or opted out of coverage entirely, receiving the difference in cash.

This year, the Public Employees' Benefits Board, which decides the health care options available to state employees, restructured its benefits package — scheduled to go into effect Jan. 1 — because of rising health care costs. Those rising prices will cost the University 15 percent more in both 2002 and 2003. Under the new plan, only one option will be available to eligible University employees, instead of the current four, according to University benefits coordinator Helen Stoop.

The plan's major changes include the elimination of the "opt-out" alternative, which allows employees to exchange health care benefits for a cash equivalent. Also, health care provider Regence BlueCross BlueShield stopped offering its popular basic package, which allowed employees some cash back.

Westling said that although the switch will not affect her coverage, she preferred the old system.

## Faculty insurance changes

Here is a comparison of the major changes, from the University's current plan to the one that will take effect in 2002:

Present	January 2002
Four health care plans	One plan
Employee choice of plans	Universal coverage
Optional cash back	No cash back
Fixed rates for health care	No fixed rates

Source: The Public Employees' Benefits Board

"It's a crummier deal," she said, "but it's not the University's fault, because the health insurance companies keep raising their rates."

University Senate President Nathan Tublitz likened the change in system to a change from employee choice to universal health care.

"What the issue boils down to is, 'What are we willing to pay for universal health coverage?'" he said.

Tublitz said that the current system essentially rewards young, unmarried employees; under the new system, those employees will subsidize people with families.

"I believe we should have universal health coverage, but not at any cost," he said.

William Baugh, an associate political science professor with a wife and no other dependents, said his health care plan will not change much as a result of the new system, "but it's going to mean our coverage is more expensive, and we're not really happy about that."

Although Tublitz said he is not certain of the overall mood of the faculty about switching to the new system, he has heard and read that "na-

tionwide, it's about a 50-50 split."


Ken Hudson, an assistant sociology professor, has no dependents but still chose a health plan so comprehensive that he doesn't get much cash back. He said the switch "probably won't affect me much."


Baugh said rising costs in health care are detracting from one of the few perks of working as a teacher.

"Traditionally in academia, really good benefits offset low salaries," Baugh said. "Now, with the way things are going, even those really good benefits are starting to not look as good."

Employers' costs to provide health care coverage have increased 10.3 percent nationwide in 2001, according to a recent survey of 360 employers by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, The Washington Business Group on Health and the Healthcare Financial Management Association. The costs of providing prescription drug benefits increased 14.6 percent during the same time, according to the survey.

Marty Toohey is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.



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