



CONSUMER NEWS

SAN DIEGO CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

MOBILE MECHANICS: Convenience may come at a cost; be a cautious consumer.

November 2014

MOBILE MECHANICS ON THE RISE

In 2013, the average cost of auto repairs was \$416.44 in California, rising 7.19 percent from the previous year according to [CarMD](#). While auto repair costs seem to be rising, the number of mobile mechanics seems to be increasing too. Mobile mechanics are convenient, less costly, and can meet your demand upon need. More mechanics are taking their business mobile in order to gain extra work and employ their skills as needed.

However, with convenience may come a cost. The convenience of such services exposes consumers to additional public safety hazards and vulnerability to fraud. While fraudulent service providers cannot be fully prevented in any capacity, staying informed is a partial shield to staying protected.

WHO ARE MOBILE AUTO REPAIR DEALERS?

An auto repair dealer, also known as mechanic, is any person who repairs or diagnoses a car's mechanical problems in exchange for money. A *mobile mechanic* is an auto repair dealer who provides the services of a mechanic with the convenience of a delivery service. A mobile mechanic is available to come to your home, office, or wherever your vehicle needs repair.

Often mobile mechanics do not incur the overhead costs of a repair shop and therefore can offer services at more affordable rates. Mobile mechanics carry their tools, expertise, and some replacement parts with them.

Many mobile mechanics advertise their services on Craigslist and other online portals that do not require advertising fees. Mechanics often refer to themselves as "master mechanic," "professional," or "reliable." These terms do not guarantee that the mechanic is a licensed professional, as required under California laws.

LAWS THAT PROTECT CONSUMERS

Incompetency and fraud are common problems for consumers using mobile mechanics. Several cases were recently filed by the San Diego City Attorney's Office in which undercover stings exposed unregistered mechanics advertising and providing mobile auto repair services. Further, individuals have been convicted by the City Attorney's Office for providing unnecessary auto repairs. Consumers are vulnerable to unnecessary auto repairs at the direction of the mechanic, whether in a shop or by a mobile mechanic. Earlier this year, the Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) conducted major stings in both Fresno and Bakersfield, arresting a total of 31 individuals for unlicensed auto work.

Similarly, many of the mechanics were posting ads for cheap repairs on Facebook and Craigslist and working on cars without a license, both of which are misdemeanor crimes subjecting suspects to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine, if convicted.

The California Business and Professions Code governs the regulation of auto mechanics. Under Chapter 20.3, the following laws are in place to protect the public:

1. Every automotive repair dealer must be registered with BAR. To check whether a mobile mechanic is registered, go to the [BAR License Search](#).
2. Upon request, consumers can demand their replaced auto parts to be returned to them after the work is finished. (B&P 9884.10).
3. A written estimate must be provided to a consumer before engaging in auto repair. The estimate must include all costs for parts and labor. No additional work, above the estimate, may be done without oral or written consent. (B&P 9884.9).
4. A written invoice detailing the work that was provided and the parts that were used must be given to consumers. (B&P 9884.8)

BENEFITS OF USING A REGISTERED MECHANIC

Although there are time & cost benefits to using a mobile mechanic, there are additional benefits for verifying that a mechanic is registered. A mechanic’s work affects the safety of your vehicle and your passengers. With safety in mind, any effort taken to ensure the credibility of your mechanic can be beneficial.

Registered mechanics can be disciplined administratively by BAR. The application process requires BAR to collect the mechanic’s personal information. This allows BAR to evaluate the candidate and retain their information for future disciplinary action. Each year, BAR negotiates \$4 million in rework, refunds, and adjustments on behalf of consumers.

TIPS FOR BEING A CAUTIOUS CONSUMER

To avoid being scammed by an incompetent or fraudulent mechanic, take the following steps to protect yourself:

- ✓ **Check for Licensing.**
The BAR uses the term “licensing” and “registration” interchangeably. You may search for a registration at the [BAR’s website](#).
- ✓ **Do not pay in advance.**
Do not pay for services in advance of getting repairs completed.
- ✓ **Do your homework.**
Evaluate the mechanic’s background, experience, and training. Consider doing your own internet search, asking for reputability in the community, and verifying their resume. Ask for information like the mechanics full name, address, phone number, and

license number in case you need to file a complaint.

- ✓ **Inspect their equipment.**
See if their equipment looks professional, clean, and organized. A seasoned mechanic will carry more than just a screwdriver and a wrench.
- ✓ **Warranties.** Be certain the mechanic honors any existing warranty on your vehicle.
- ✓ **Evaluate your estimate.**
Compare estimates between multiple mechanics. Also, make sure you understand the repairs that the mechanic will be doing before authorizing repairs.
- ✓ **Ask about guarantees.**
Guarantees are not mandated, but if your mechanic is willing to provide one, ask about the terms and conditions of the guaranteed work. If possible, get the agreement in writing.

THE CITY ATTORNEY’S ROLE

Agencies, such as BAR, refer their criminal investigations to the San Diego City Attorney’s Office and other agencies for prosecution. Criminal prosecution of unregistered individuals helps BAR protect consumers from subpar repair work. Joint enforcement also ensures registration and compliance with California law.

Before referring matters to the San Diego City Attorney’s Office, BAR investigators interview consumers, inspect repair work, and interview mechanics. Also, BAR often conducts “sting” operations, exposing unlicensed activity in the community.

If you have a complaint against a mobile mechanic, be sure to contact your local regulating agency. The Bureau of Automotive Repair in San Diego can be reached by

telephone at (858)716-1025. For more consumer information from the BAR, [click here](#). To submit a *complaint* with BAR, access the BAR website complaint form [here](#).

To report a violation to the San Diego City Attorney’s Office, complete the [City Attorney complaint form](#) and submit it to the San Diego City Attorney’s Office by mailing to: 1200 Third Avenue, Suite 700, San Diego, CA 92101.

Sources: Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code, Division 3: Chapter 20.3; [www.bar.ca.gov](#).

**San Diego
City Attorney’s Office
Consumer and Environmental
Protection Unit
(619) 533-5600**

Newsletter written by Shannon Wicks.



The information provided in this newsletter is intended to convey general information and is not intended to be relied upon as legal advice.



The San Diego City Attorney’s Consumer & Environmental Protection Unit prosecutes criminal and civil violations of California’s unfair competition and other consumer laws committed in the City of San Diego. The Unit maintains a Phone Hotline for consumers to report possible violations. You can reach the Hotline at **(619) 533-5600**.