

Finding the Value in Estimating Guides

Most often when I answer an estimating question for someone, they ask me, “Where did you find that?” or something similar. My answer: the estimating guide, or, as many refer to them, the P-pages. The example I chose for this article is the Motors Guide to Estimating. It has 40 pages of content and is broken up into six categories of information that guide you through the estimating steps to complete an accurate damage appraisal. As you read through this article, I would like you to focus on the word *guide*. The P-pages and your estimating system are *guides*, but not all inclusive of what is required to repair a vehicle. You can find the guides for the major three estimating databases on the Database Enhancement Gateway (DEG) in the [Estimators Toolbox](#).

As I mentioned the Motors Guide to Estimating has six categories: General Information, Industry Definitions, Special Precautions, Labor Operations, Moldings Stripe Tape & Drill Times, and Refinishing Procedures. I will touch on a few of my favorites in each section, but I encourage you to completely read the procedure pages to find the full value. The “General Information” section reviews the estimating process to help you understand how the estimating program works. Note the very first paragraph: “*Operations times reported herein are compiled from available manufacturer data, as well as our own evaluation of shop data and are published only as an estimating guide.*” This paragraph reinforces what I said earlier that this is, in fact, a guide.

The *Industry Definition* section has more detail on the workings of the estimating database. The first paragraph, **Add If Required**, indicates that there could be extra procedures necessary dependent on optional factory equipment or certain collision scenarios. This is where you will start finding value as we know that no two accidents are the same and “on the spot” evaluations could determine if additional processes are required. **Component Classification** brings value as it defines the different labor times such as mechanical and structural, and even states that the body has no classification and is for components that don’t fall under mechanical or structural. This should be a trigger for you as currently much of a damage appraisal is classified as body. Using the definitions found here shows that mechanical and structural should be primary. This is explained more in the **Structural Component Identification** section. The **Included and/or Not Included Labor Operations** section brings some clarification to how *included* and *not included* labor is determined. Essentially if it is not in the *included* category, it is not included in the operation.

I believe the *Special Precautions* section is a must-read as it provides information that describes steps you must take to not only perform a proper repair, but to keep your people safe as well. **Acoustical and Structural Foam Fillers** defines when and how much foam must be removed prior to a repair. In **Electronic Systems & On-Board Computers** it identifies the cautions you must take around the sensitive electronics found in the vehicles. Additional safety precautions are found in the **Hybrid/Electric Vehicle** section where it specifies OEM safety precautions should be followed. There is a very specific note in the **Restraint System (Air Bag)** section: “NOTE: RESTRAINT SYSTEMS, REPLACEMENT COMPONENTS AND INSPECTION COMPONENTS ARE FOR ESTIMATING PURPOSES ONLY.” It goes on to state that you must always refer to the vehicle manufacturer’s recommended repair procedures when servicing any air bag system. The **Special Substrates** section has some very important information about the materials used in vehicle construction and how they are identified in the estimating database. There has been a lot of

attention given to steering columns, and in the **Steering Column** section it identifies the need for inspection and the recommendation to follow vehicle manufacturers' guidelines.

The *Labor Operations* category is the longest with 22 pages of content defining the operations for virtually every part of a vehicle. My favorite section is the **Estimated Work Time Premise** as it defines work times for the tasks often found in collision repair. It does have the caveat that I've been talking about, as in the first paragraph it states, "*The estimated work times reported in this publication are to be used as a GUIDE ONLY.*" They follow that with a recommendation that you should review OEM repair procedures to identify specific requirements. It also reminds us that the operations are based on new and undamaged parts installed on new and undamaged vehicles. This statement leads me to my favorite part, which is the list of about 50 items that are not included in any labor operation. Here you will find items like, *Access to repair information/subscription cost, Alignment, straightening, or verifying the dimensional accuracy of related parts, Broken glass removal or clean-up, Cutting, pulling or pushing collision damaged parts for access, Scan tool diagnostics and Welder set-up or preparation.* As you read through this section it is important to review the special notations as they contain additional information about the process which could lead to additional operations.

Moldings, Stripe Tape and Drill Times is a small category but there are some key points not included such as adhesive backing removal, damage panel repair, drill time for round holes only, and varied time between a new or repaired panel.

A category I feel people miss operations in most often is *Refinishing Procedures* which also has a list of items not included in any refinish operation and require on the spot evaluations. The first paragraph in **Refinish Time Premise** explains that refinish times are for one color applied to a new undamaged component. Additionally, it states that refinish times may be applied after a damaged panel has been returned to a new undamaged panel. Using that information alongside what is found in **Repaired Panel Refinishing** leads me to the **Prime & Block** section, an area I get a lot of questions about. This is the process that takes a damaged panel from the body repair to new undamaged condition, and is critical for preparing a repaired panel for refinishing. The **Quarter Panels and Other Major Welded Panel** section dictates that the refinishing time is for exterior panel only, and extra time is required for the backside of panels and recessed edges, gutters, and pockets. For **Basic Color Application** there are almost as many items that are not included as there are included, so it is important to review it completely to ensure you capture all the operations being performed by refinish technicians. An area that is often missed on appraisals I review is **Edges of New Parts (Edging)**. They will often add the edging but forget to add clear on the edging because it is not included and is a manual step in the estimating system. Another area that is often missed is **Underside Colors** as many manufacturers are using a second color or tint on jambs, engine compartments and trunks. This requires an additional paint mix to create that different color and additional time is warranted.

I hope I have enlightened you enough to spend some time on your estimating system's P-pages and that you understand how much more is involved in a damage appraisal than what your estimating system provides. Without using the P-pages, you are only scratching the surface of the information available in your estimating system, and without referring to the manufacturer's repair

procedures you are missing vital steps. Please remember the word repeated often in the P-pages, that it is a *guide*. You must use your knowledge and the information provided in the manufacturer's repair procedures to create an accurate damage appraisal. The estimating database should be used as a documentation tool, not the source of repair information. I believe if you follow these tips about using the P-pages, your damage appraisals will be more informative and profitable.