

Defining a Vehicle Repair Process

One of the issues I find with some of the damage appraisals I review is the repair lines only itemize the end result. Some of you may be asking yourselves, “What is wrong with that?” I can tell you that following this process only skims the surface of what the repair really requires. By following this process, you also run the risk of losing control of how the repair should be accomplished, relying solely on the technician’s understanding of the correct repair process.

During a recent estimate review, I saw a repair line for six hours of body time to repair a quarter panel. That line itemized the end result; the writer wanted the quarter panel repaired and he was giving the technician six hours to complete that task. If the writer were to have watched the technician actually repair that quarter panel, they would have learned the steps required to accomplish that task. That is exactly what I am asking you to do as you complete a damage appraisal – visualize the steps required to complete the repair to ensure the repair lines reflects all the work being done throughout the process.

Look back at the quarter panel repair with the understanding that body labor is time for prepping the metal, applying body filler and finishing the repair to a 180 grit finish as defined in [3M Collision Standard Operating Procedures](#). More often than not, there is a dent that needs to be pulled before body filler can be applied which should be listed as a separate operation. Break down the six hours mentioned above and think about itemizing the individual repair steps. Moving two or three of those six repair hours to an “align” operation to bring the panel back into shape using pull tabs would more accurately define what needed to be accomplished.

I was asked why it made a difference on how the repair was written. Think about that for a minute: if you are directing how the repair should be accomplished, you may be forgetting some important questions. How many times have you been asked for pull time from a technician after they saw the damage? Also, if you are directing how the repair should be accomplished, you will add steps that are often missed. If you just used the repair line for six hours and let the technician repair it the way they saw fit, would you know weld-tabs were used? Would you have added for repair weld-tab burn damage on the inside of the panel? Will those steps be accomplished if you don’t itemize them? Breaking down the repair with individual repair lines identifying the steps will keep you in control of the repair and ensure the quality you expect is achieved.

Another tool to help you identify the steps required to accomplish a repair is the [SCRS Guide to Complete Repair Planning](#), especially in regards to remove and reinstall (R&I) operations. Because you defined the quarter panel repair and know weld-tabs will be used, you can itemize the R&I operations required to allow you to accomplish the burn damage repairs on the inside of the panel. This also gives you the opportunity to check for electrical components that are in the area the weld-tabs will be used and document their removal in a repair line. As you begin selecting R&Is and review the procedure pages you will see them begin to accumulate. To take out the quarter or back glass, you will need to remove interior trim which might require you to remove a seat or other components.

As you look further into the 3M SOP, you will see the steps to complete the body repair through a Feather-Prime-Block operation. This is where the repair that was finished to 180 grit is now

refined to 320 and then 400. Feather-Prime-Block is a required refinish procedure as it restores a repaired panel surface to that of a new undamaged panel which is the premise for all panel refinishing procedures. Not identifying this portion of the repair as an estimate line causes the process to be accomplished either by the body repair technician or the painter for free.

As you finalize documenting your repair, you will see the need to itemize removal of corrosion protection and/or seam sealer in the repaired area. There are specific steps to ensure the repaired area is cleaned so the repair can be accomplished as well as possible for re-application. Identifying these processes as repair lines is the only way to communicate the requirement and validate they were accomplished.

I hope reading this article helped you realize that you should not be asking for a quarter panel to be repaired, but rather defining the complete repair process. Itemizing each step of the repair through individual repair lines will illustrate the expected result to all involved. I encourage you to look at some of your damage appraisals: do they provide answers or create questions? Answering questions before they are asked is what keeps your collision center productive and profitable, and saves you and your team extra work in the long run.