



# NEWS • REPORT

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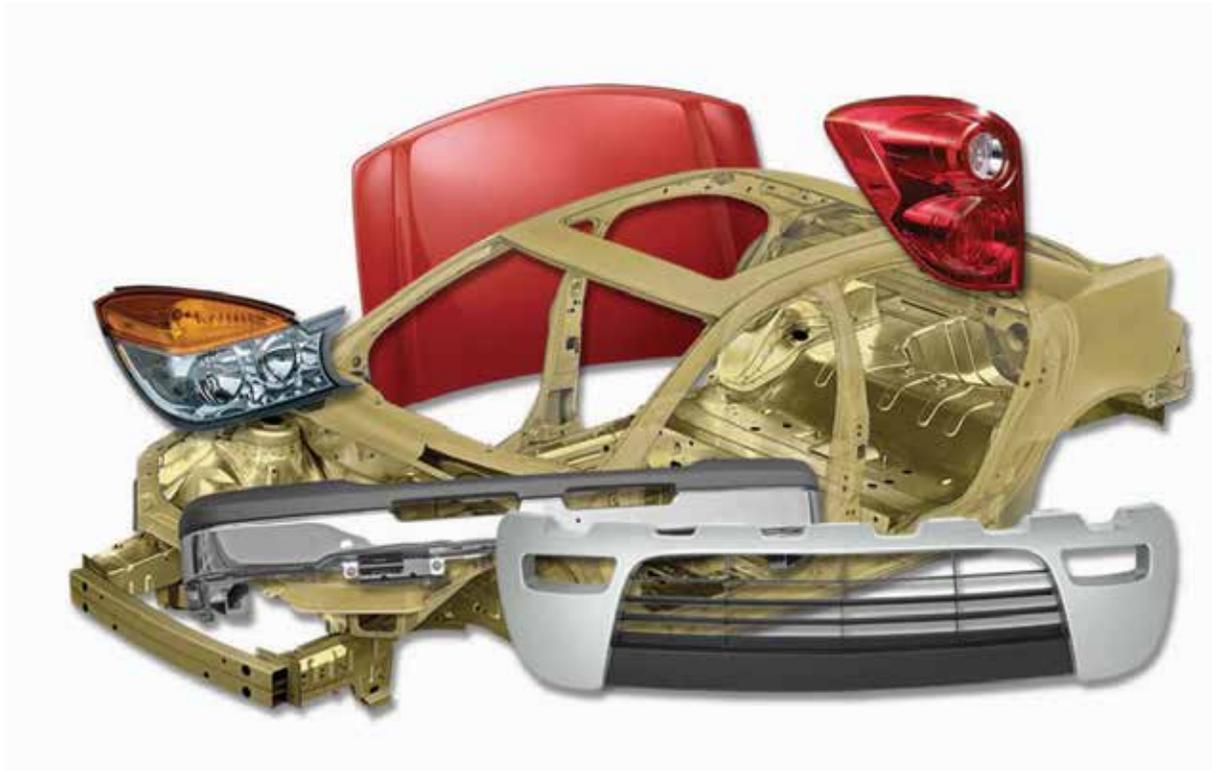
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## Thank You!!!!

Issues for NDABA News Report

| Issue   | Copy Deadline | Printing Date |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| February-March  | Mar. 1        | Mar. 15       |
| <i>(Note: Dates for the pre-convention issue may vary.)</i> |               |               |
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On the other hand, we want to reach every possible person we can that is part of the Auto Body profession. We include owners, service technicians, brokers, distributors and suppliers. So, if you know of someone that is not receiving the *News Report*, please provide us with their name and address below. Thank you!!

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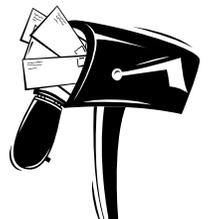
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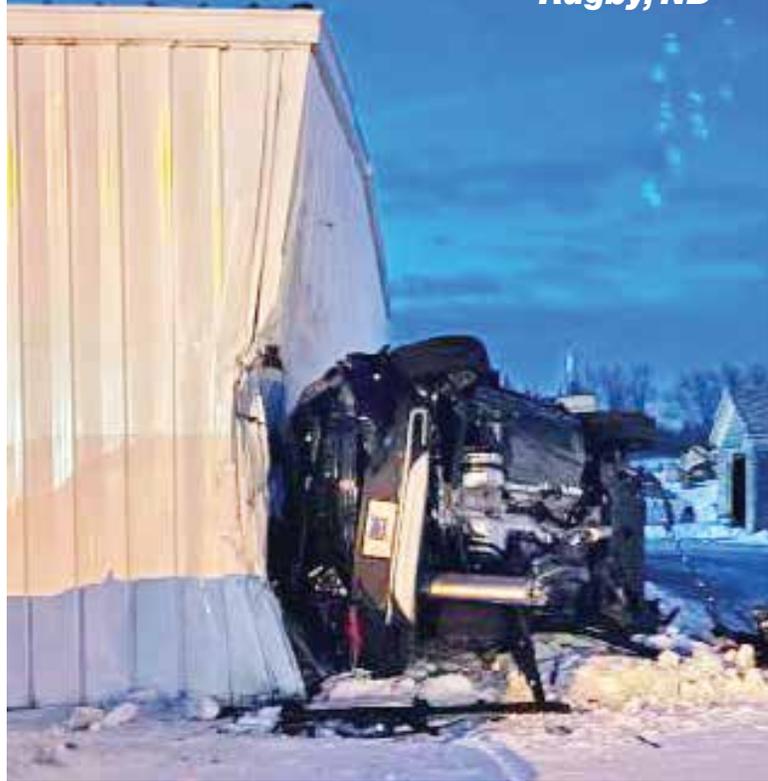
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# INFLATION:

## What are the causes & how should shops plan ahead?

By Lurah Lowery on January 17, 2022

Reprinted with permission from SCRS Repairer Driven News

### **Supply chain issues go hand in hand with increased costs – that’s a given that repairers and business owners see at work and at home – and as inflation rates soar, what are the factors that lie behind the current economic grappling?**

Collision repair shop owners are facing rising commercial insurance, parts, material, shipping and utilities costs as prices adjust for inflation while CCC Intelligent Solutions Senior Director and Industry Analyst Susanna Gotsch said insurers have seen the cost per claim rise sharply over the last two years.

Insurers base their rates on historical frequency, or the number, of claims and repair costs. For decades, both had been consistent until the pandemic hit.

“With the pandemic, however, it has been difficult to estimate how quickly claim counts would return to pre-pandemic levels as there was no historical precedent,” Gotsch said.

A Wills Towers Watson’s Commercial Lines Insurance Pricing Survey (CLIPS) compared commercial insurance prices charged during the second quarter of 2021 with those charged during the same quarter in 2020, and found that prices rose just above 6% on average.

The cost of raw materials going up, parts and chip shortages as well as supply chain issues including cargo ships backlogged at Los Angeles and Long Beach ports have all led to the inflation hike.

As Gotsch pointed out, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, goods were stuck on the other side of the world and as outbreaks continue overseas raw materials and goods production as well as shipping capabilities remain limited. Demand also surged at a much faster rate than anticipated.

Gross domestic product (GDP) – a comprehensive measure of U.S. economic activity – increased at an annual rate of 2.3% in the third quarter of 2021, following an increase of 6.7% in the second quarter, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The bureau attributed the slowdown to decreased consumer spending and a resurgence of COVID-19 cases that led to new restrictions and delays in businesses reopening.

The annual Consumer Price Index rose 7% by the end of December over the last year, which was the largest 12-month increase since the period ending in June 1982. A November Pew Research article attributes the “acceleration” of the inflation rate to “continuing disruptions in global supply chains amid the coronavirus pandemic; turmoil in the labor markets; the fact that today’s prices are being measured against prices during last year’s COVID-19-induced shutdowns; and strong consumer demand after local economies were reopened.”

As chip supply improves and automakers start to ramp up production, there will likely be suppliers who could shift their focus to making parts for new vehicles versus existing vehicles. “It’s a much more lucrative proposition for them and they can make bigger batches of it and not worry about it sitting there and not getting used,” Gotsch said. She predicts the same for the aftermarket side of the industry.

### **Replacement parts**

Last year saw substantial increases in the cost of all replacement parts. The average aggregate cost per replacement part through early December went up more than 8% in 2021, which Gotsch called “unprecedented.”

Historically, annual increases have been in the 0.5-1.5% range, she said. “It’s not just windshields, it’s not just sheet metal, it’s not just aluminum,” Gotsch said. “It’s across all part types whether it’s aftermarket or OEM.

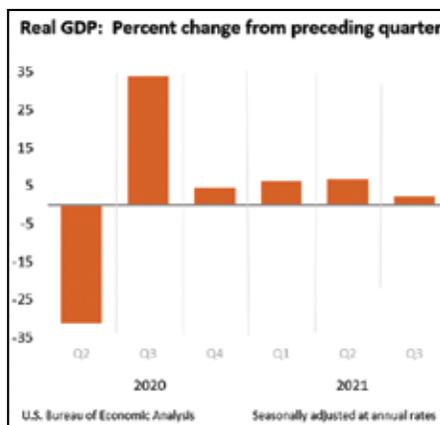
“The challenges are when you look at repair costs, for example, historically about 42% of the overall cost is for replacement parts so we know we’ve got significant inflation there and that’s been in place through 2021.”

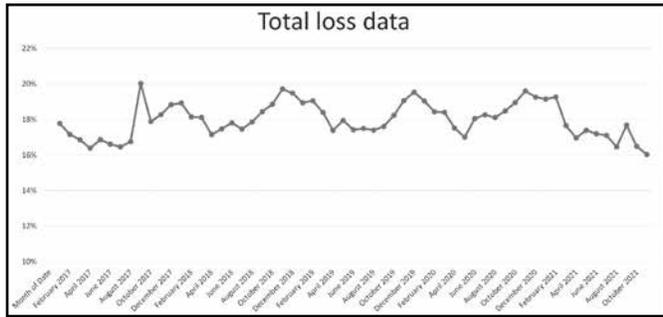
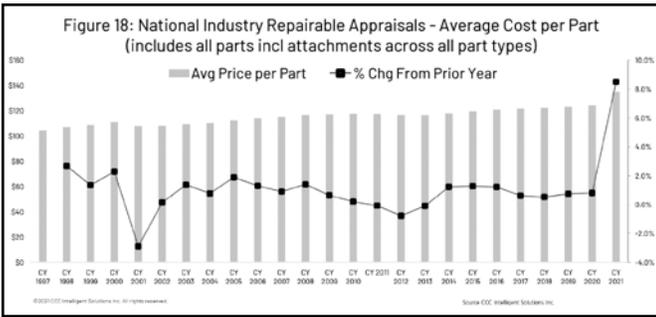
While the rise in parts costs are a large portion of what insurance companies are seeing as repair costs escalate, that’s not necessarily a contributing factor to overcoming or easing the other rising costs facing collision repair businesses.

“We’re in a market where frequency is slowly recovering, but costs have accelerated at a much, much faster rate than anybody had anticipated,” Gotsch said.

Mitchell International Claims Performance Director Ryan Mandell said there are “two different forces at play” when it comes to inflation – core, or real inflation based on individual part prices, and complexity of parts.

“Parts have been relatively stable for some time and those parts prices increased then obviously that just increases the overall cost of repair,” Mandell said. “The paint material side, we’re seeing most shops outside the Southeast pretty much just use an hourly rate to calculate their paint materials. I think we’re going to see a lot of fluctuation in those prices over the





next couple years so that's going to play into this as well in addition to all of the actual pure core inflationary pressures.”

Parts that have to do with technology have the highest cost increase followed by grills because of front-wave radar sensors, according to Mandell.

Mandell noted that insurers are looking at inflation from the cost side and plays a role in total loss outcomes. Total loss frequency is declining right now with the rise in used car prices, he said. Used car prices have been going up since 2020, purportedly due to the pandemic decreasing the amount of new cars being manufactured. Look at it this way – if a car that was worth \$10,000 six months ago needs a \$6,000 repair it’s

likely going to be deemed a total loss. On the other hand, if it’s worth \$12,000, the \$6,000 repair will likely happen, Mandell said.

Gotsch wrote in CCC’s 2021 Midyear Crash Course Report that repair costs for all loss categories increased 6% from the second quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021.

In just one of many articles detailing repairer and consumer frustrations with supply chain shortages pushing out repair times – what used to take days can now take weeks or months – The Detroit News reported in December that the extended repair time is caused by collision shops and dealers having to wait on needed parts leaving customers

without a ride. Those that have the option for insurance to pay for a rental are met with time running out and paying out-of-pocket to rent. Enterprise Rent-A-Car’s 2021 third quarter U.S. Length of Rental (LOR) report showed a national average LOR of 15.2 days – an increase of almost three full days when compared to the 2020 third quarter report.

### Paint and other materials

Paint price hikes had already been happening for several months by July 2021, due to “unprecedented” rising costs for raw materials. PPG Industries increased its prices twice from August 2020 to August 2021. Chairman and CEO Michael McGarry said during a second quarter earnings call those increases paired with rising transportation costs “drove raw material inflation to be up a mid- to high-teen percentage on a year-over-year basis versus our original estimate of a high single-digit percentage increase.” He added that despite PPG prioritizing selling price increases across all of its businesses, the “inflationary environment” was worse than expected.

PPG wasn’t alone; every refinish company communicated larger, and more-frequent than usual increases. In fact, readership documented three price increases from Sherwin-Williams over the course of 2021 on Jan. 1, Aug. 1 and Nov. 1.

A flyer from Sherwin-Williams details out paint cost increases and shortages as a consistent result of raw material price increases, ongoing raw material shortages due to the impact of Winter Storm Uri, trade conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic as well as increased labor shortages. Resin and latex costs have gone up 11-19%, pigments by 1-2%, containers 7-12% and additives and solvents by 17-30%, according to the flyer.

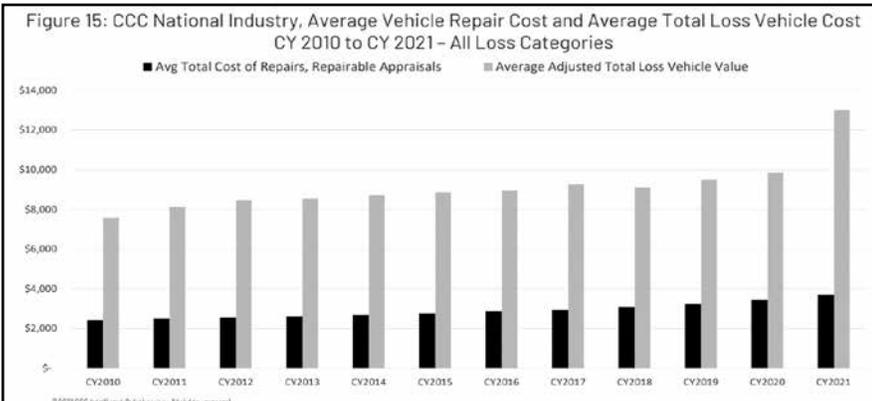
In a July 15, 2021 press release

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**Figure 19 / Repairable Vehicle Damage Appraisals (All Loss Categories) - Vehicle Mix Statistics by Calendar Year**

SOURCE: CCC INTELLIGENT SOLUTIONS INC., CCC NATIONAL INDUSTRY

|                                | 03'16-02'17 | 03'17-02'18 | 03'18-02'19 | 03'19-02'20 | 03'20-02'21 |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Avg Repair Cost                | \$2,903     | \$2,988     | \$3,156     | \$3,327     | \$3,527     |
| % Chg from prior calendar year | n/a         | 2.9%        | 5.6%        | 5.4%        | 6.0%        |
| Non-Driveable %                | 20.4%       | 20.8%       | 20.4%       | 20.8%       | 22.7%       |
| % of Claims with Suppl(s)      | 50.4%       | 52.5%       | 54.3%       | 58.8%       | 63.2%       |
| Suppl % of Total Repair Cost   | 15.3%       | 16.7%       | 17.8%       | 18.5%       | 19.2%       |
| Avg Vehicle Age                | 5.90        | 5.90        | 5.93        | 6.06        | 6.25        |
| Avg CCC Regional Value Amt     | \$15,470    | \$15,891    | \$18,272    | \$18,537    | \$17,521    |
| Avg Odometer                   | 79,830      | 79,566      | 79,340      | 80,602      | 83,131      |
| Avg Mileage per Vehicle Year   | 13,465      | 13,492      | 13,381      | 13,309      | 13,308      |
| Parts % Total Repair Cost      | 39.8%       | 40.0%       | 40.0%       | 40.1%       | 40.3%       |
| Avg # Parts Repl per Claim     | 9.5         | 9.8         | 10.3        | 10.8        | 11.2        |
| OEM % of Total Part Amt        | 62.6%       | 62.3%       | 61.7%       | 62.1%       | 61.3%       |
| Labor % Total Repair Cost      | 41.2%       | 40.4%       | 40.0%       | 39.6%       | 39.2%       |
| Avg Labor Hrs per Claim        | 23.2        | 23.2        | 23.5        | 23.8        | 24.4        |
| Avg Hourly Body Rate           | \$48.31     | \$49.52     | \$50.94     | \$51.88     | \$52.50     |
| % Chg from prior calendar year | n/a         | 2.5%        | 2.9%        | 1.8%        | 1.2%        |
| Repair % Total Labor Amt       | 42.2%       | 40.8%       | 40.3%       | 39.8%       | 37.9%       |
| Total Loss % Vol               | 17.2%       | 18.3%       | 18.8%       | 19.7%       | 20.7%       |
| Collision Losses % Vol         | 53.4%       | 53.9%       | 53.7%       | 53.2%       | 54.0%       |
| Comprehensive Losses % Vol     | 16.4%       | 15.9%       | 16.1%       | 17.7%       | 20.8%       |
| Liability Losses % Vol         | 30.2%       | 30.1%       | 30.2%       | 28.0%       | 25.4%       |
| Vehicles 7 Years & Older % Vol | 37.3%       | 35.9%       | 35.3%       | 35.6%       | 37.6%       |
| Light Truck % Vol              | 47.0%       | 49.1%       | 51.2%       | 53.6%       | 56.4%       |
| Asian Vehicles % Vol           | 49.9%       | 50.2%       | 50.7%       | 50.2%       | 49.2%       |
| Domestic Vehicles % Vol        | 40.5%       | 40.3%       | 39.8%       | 40.3%       | 41.5%       |
| European Vehicles % Vol        | 9.5%        | 9.5%        | 9.5%        | 9.5%        | 9.2%        |



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## Inflation...

(Continued from page 5)

announcing price increases, Axalta Coating Systems CFO Sean Lannon said even with “aggressive cost-control” measures the company was facing “extraordinary cost and inflationary pressures.” Axalta is a global supplier of liquid and powder coatings.

“These pressures have made it necessary to appropriately raise prices to help offset ongoing cost increases and ensure our ability to continue delivering exceptional support, innovative solutions, and best-in-class products to our customers,” he said.

British Coatings Federation reported earlier this month that in the last quarter of 2021 solvent prices were up 78% by the end of November compared to the same time in 2020 and resins and related materials were 39% higher. Packaging prices were also up by 19%.

Echoing Sherwin-Williams’ report, Mandell also referenced factors that led to recent increases are manufacturing and shipping costs going up. Raw material prices have increased significantly, especially steel and plastics, which the creation of requires petroleum and petroleum costs have also increased, he said.

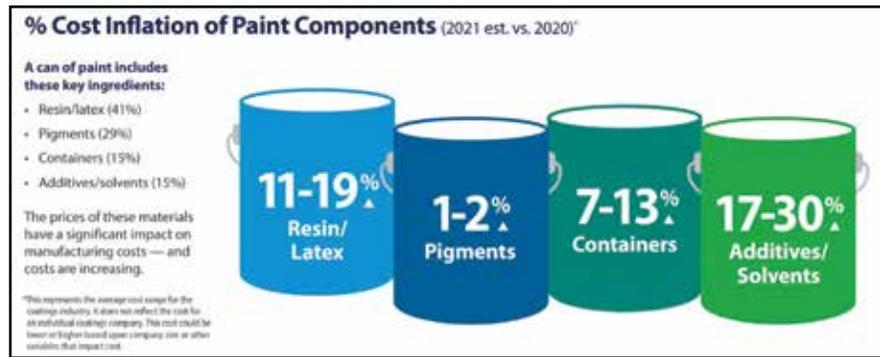
“All of that is going into this situation where the manufacturers’ input costs have increased and they don’t have the same flow of volume and so they have to make up for that margin in some way,” Mandell said. “You also have to think about manufacturers in terms of how they’ve been impacted throughout this pandemic.

“While used car prices are extremely high right now we still haven’t seen a return to the dealer volumes that we’ve seen in the past and so manufacturers need to make up profit lost from the sale of new cars and so parts is one strategy for doing that.”

Mitchell plans to release a comprehensive study based on 2021 data on several parts to determine the real inflation impact last year.

Many companies have had to pass on increased costs for packaging, freight and other expenditures on to their customers.

Trade publication USGlass magazine reported in May that architectural glass fabricator Viracon had notified customers of a upcoming price increases of 8-13% on float glass and coated float glass due to increases from primary



glass suppliers.

Concrete accessories manufacturer and distributor OCM Inc. and Yamato Transport USA are just a couple of several companies that announced freight surcharges to offset increasing costs. OCM stated in a March 23, 2021 notice to customers that it could no longer absorb the full cost of shipping on freight orders and would soon implement a 3% surcharge.

“... market conditions continue to put immense pressure on the cost of raw materials and finished goods,” wrote Ray Sullivan, vice president of sales and marketing, in the notice. “At the same time, rising diesel fuel costs and a limited supply of drivers have also increased shipping rates dramatically and this trend is expected to persist over the next few months.

Yamato began charging a 6.5% emergency situation surcharge in April 2020 in addition to its fuel surcharge citing “sharp increases in air freight costs due to flight suspensions and unexpected additional costs for internal and external safety measures” due to the pandemic.

## Raw materials

CRU Group’s Jan. 11 Steel Market Update reported hot rolled steel dipping below \$1,500 per ton for the first time since April 2021 with prices reaching a high of \$1,955 per ton by September. The average price this week is \$1,480 per ton, down \$55 from last week with cold rolled and galvanized steel prices seeing similar declines of \$30-45 per ton, according to the report.

In May 2021, The Dow Chemical Co. increased its glycol ether prices five to 10 cents per pound. Global journal Coatings World reported in January 2021 that sharp price increases for epoxy resins and supply bottlenecks were adding to the difficulties of paint and coatings manufacturers in the United Kingdom and across Europe

compounding the “already existing pressures” caused by the pandemic.

“Strong demand from certain markets is driving up prices while an unexpectedly rapid V shaped recovery in China is also fueling demand for these essential raw materials,” the report states.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration reported earlier this month that crude oil climbed more than \$13 from December to January to around \$80 per barrel. In 2021, the average price was more than \$70 per barrel as the global demand for petroleum products increased faster than production, leading to global inventory draws, according to the EIA.

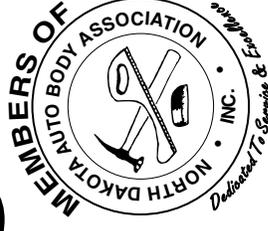
Rising utilities costs also must be considered as consequences of inflation, and that’s not limited to an added expense for shop owners – households and businesses across the board are feeling the sting. The U.S. Energy Information Administration’s Winter Fuels Outlook 2021-2022 report found that 48% of households heat their homes with natural gas and it’s estimated they’ll spend over 30% more to do so than they did last winter. The EIA estimates the 39% that heat with electricity will spend over 6% more.

While a much smaller portion of the population heats their homes with heating oil and propane — 4% and 5% respectively — they’re likely seeing the highest cost increases. The EIA estimated heating oil will cost 43% more and propane 54% more this winter.

For a large business, or even smaller shops with budgets that are already tight – imagine how hard increases such as those could impact bottom lines. And it’s not just heating costs. Energy prices are up 33.3% overall with fuel up 59.3%, natural gas up 25.1% and electricity up 6.5%, according to the November Consumer Price Index by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

(Continued on page 10)

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## Inflation...

(Continued from page 7)

Ron Reichen, owner of Precision Body & Paint in Oregon, said his natural gas bill has gone up 11% making it \$7 an hour to operate each of his paint booths. One of his locations has six booths that run 15 hours a day – that's \$630 a day just to operate the booths at one location.

## Labor rates

Labor rates are always the last cost to change when it comes to inflation because once they're up, employees won't be happy if they're brought back down, Gotsch said, but it's a fight repairers and advocacy groups have been waging for several years. One recent example is when auto body shop owners told Massachusetts representatives and senators in September that they're reimbursed an average of \$40 an hour for skilled labor, which they said is the lowest rate in the nation. They testified during a Joint Committee on Financial Service hearing that insurers use a "prevailing rate" that's based on deals made with a minority of Bay State repairers, and that the state needs to step

in to regulate the rate. The fight against the prevailing rate practice is also being fought in Texas.

Gotsch predicts the auto technician shortage will get worse this year as demand rises and shops start increasing labor costs. "Those costs will have to be passed along to the marketplace."

When insurance companies deny the rate increase, shops have very little options, and oftentimes this difference further strains small businesses to the point of closure or consolidation or forces them to pass costs on to their customers. Arguments made by insurers to legislators that increased rates will raise premiums feels empty when consumers are saddled with the direct bill for items that are denied in claims.

During a Jan. 11 Auto Body Association of Texas meeting, AkzoNobel Performance Coatings Senior Services Consultant Tim Ronak cautioned against waiting for the consequences of inflation to take their toll. Small businesses, he said, tend to have a reactive response to cost increases and lose profits rather than increasing prices ahead of time like larger businesses usually do with a

strategic proactive approach. Ronak noted that labor rate increases are valuable but not as much as getting paid for all the procedures that need to be performed.

"I don't want you thinking that if a labor rate increase isn't coming then your world comes to an end," he said. "There are other pieces of this equation that you need to be able to bill for."

Ronak recommended using the Billable Genie tool to identify operations that shops aren't billing for and said now is the time to figure out how they'll pay their employees more to help them cover the cost increases they're facing at home. ABAT encouraged shops to take labor rate surveys to keep databases current and make the market more fair for everyone in the collision repair industry.

Moving forward, Gotsch recommends shops lay out their cost structures, what's driving their costs, know what costs they can cover and those that they can't, what can be managed by changing processes rather than raising costs. Should be able to break down reasons for cost increases and cost structure to insurers.

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# The 6 Laws of Modern Estimating

By Paul Hodowanic on November 18, 2021

This story was originally published at FenderBender.com



**When referencing the collision repair industry, it has become commonplace to describe it as “changing” or “evolving.” More so than many other industries, collision repairers have had to keep up with a host of new technology.**

In vehicles themselves, they’ve had to adapt to increasing amounts of ADAS and the arrival of hybrids and EVs. From a shop operations perspective—from sorting through a bevy of shop management system options and other digital tools to the introduction of artificial intelligence in the insurance process—the COVID-19 pandemic only accelerated many of these trends.

Every spot in the shop, from technician to detailer to service advisor, has experienced a change in workflow and job description. But nobody may have seen a bigger and more difficult shift in their day-to-day job than estimator, says Teddy Haynes, an auto and truck instructor for Vale National Training Center, which offers classes for collision repairers, insurers, and independent adjusters.

“It’s 100 percent harder than it’s ever been to be an estimator,” he says.

From researching to writing estimates to dealing with increasingly absent field adjusters all while the admin-to-tech ratio shrinks, keeping up and thriving as an estimator is becoming a tougher and tougher task—and it becomes easier and easier to miss steps in the process.

So what does every successful modern estimator need to do to succeed? With the help of industry experts and top estimators, FenderBender has compiled the six laws of modern estimating.

## LAW 1: You have to do your research.

It may sound obvious, but the first and most important requirement to being a successful estimator in 2021 is research. Many estimators, especially older ones, have struggled with such a shift.

“Back 15 or 20 years ago, things weren’t really changing. Yes, new cars were being made. But nowadays

manufacturers are changing procedures every day and EVs and hybrids are hard to get information on,” Haynes says, “and some people are still struggling to adapt.”

And that means searching everywhere.

Haynes will go to traditional outlets like I-CAR, or if a shop is certified, repair procedures that the OEM releases. But it also means looking on YouTube and Google for information on repair procedures, parts, and processes of similar jobs. If information is still missing, which Haynes says happens frequently, he’ll call other friends in the industry who might know. Estimators need to be “resourceful,” Haynes says. That might mean hitting five dead ends before finally finding the information. Estimators need to be ready for that challenge.

Josh Kuehn, a coach for Collision Advice who specializes in estimating, has seen a shift as well. Estimators need to be more aware of OEM procedures and the constant updates to position statements. That also means understanding developing ADAS technology and all the research requirements wrapped up in them.

That’s why Kuehn recommends always checking the OEM site first. It’s the most trustworthy and most likely to have the information the estimator needs. Most manufacturers don’t require the shop to be certified to access their site, which is another common misperception, Kuehn says. Take advantage of 24-hour or other short-term subscription options. The time the estimator will save scrounging the internet for the information makes up for the cost of the subscription.

Riane Twining, body shop manager at Preferred Collision Center in Muskegon, Mich., will even cross-reference

information from multiple sources before doing a repair. She checks the OEM website, but also looks at I-CAR and uses Google. At least half of the work in the shop comes from DRPs.

Another gold mine of information that Kuehn has uncovered is the various industry estimating systems.

“For a lot of people, whether they use one estimating system or three, there is a lot of information in the estimating guide that they’re not aware of,” Kuehn says.

In each estimating guide, there is a list of all non-included operations, Kuehn says, which are often missed by estimators because of the “daily grind” of being an estimator.

Including those will allow the business to be more profitable, a must in the current state of the industry, which is seeing profit margins shrink as parts prices go up and labor rates remain stagnant.

Kuehn also notes that those non-included operations lists might not list everything that can be deemed “non-included.” Kuehn’s rule of thumb is that if it is not listed as “included”, then everything else is non-included, regardless of whether or not they are listed as a “non-included” operation.

The estimating guides will include other small nuggets of information, like prepping raw plastic parts for bumper covers, rocker moldings and trunk covers.

## LAW 2: Documentation is no joke.

One of the byproducts of COVID-19 was an accelerated move to remote adjusting from insurance companies. While it was already trending in that direction, the pandemic quickly forced

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## 6 Laws...

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estimators, both from non-DRP and DRP shops, to take on many of the responsibilities previously held by field adjusters, ranging from administrative tasks to taking photos and documenting and submitting supplements. On top of that, working with adjusters became harder as they couldn't see the vehicle in person and there wasn't a chance to develop a personal connection with the adjuster in the same way as they could before.

Adam Mette, production manager at Probst Auto Body in Dieterich, Ill., and 2019 FenderBender Award winner, has seen his role shift dramatically in the seven years he's been in the industry, mostly as adjusters have been less present and, as Mette puts it, less knowledgeable.

Despite taking on absolutely zero DRP work, Mette says, "we are basically doing their job for them."

As a result, a bigger priority has been placed on documentation and making sure the estimating process is organized. Not only do they need to fulfill the

role of an adjuster, they need to make it informative enough to convince an adjuster who may have little knowledge of the vehicle, Mette says.

One area that has been affected is photos. When taking good photos, approval can become relatively easy. Mette takes photos of everything, and focuses on the quality of each. The photo needs to clearly show the issue in question. It can't be a task that estimators simply check off on their long checklists. Mette estimates with good photos he gets approval 90 percent of the time.

Haynes stresses that the photo taking process is pivotal. All four corners should be photographed. They need to be clear and it should essentially replace line notes.

"It should get to the point where you're taking photos and wouldn't even need to explain anything. Photos alone should explain what's going on," Haynes says.

However, don't replace line notes with photos. Having photos is important, but having a thorough description of the issue in the line notes of the estimate is one thing Kuehn emphasizes in his

teaching.

"Your catch phrase should be, 'make it hard for them to say no and easy for them to say yes,'" Kuehn says. "Line notes are the best way to do that."

Kuehn says he sends back many of his students' line notes because they don't make sense and aren't descriptive enough. If done right, line notes will save time and reduce the stress on estimators. Just as an estimate's photos should be able to replace line notes, detailed line notes should be as descriptive as pictures. Include what particular parts are damaged and what needs repair or a replacement. Don't ever give the insurance company a reason to question why something is on the estimate. Detailed line notes give estimators the ability to justify their claims, Kuehn says, so use them to their full potential.

### **LAW 3: Embrace technology, new and old**

To Kuehn, one of the biggest assets that not enough shops are using is the Blueprint Optimization Tool (BOT), created by the Society for Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS). When asked about the three most important tools/

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resources that a modern estimator needs, Kuehn said BOT software was second, behind OEM repair procedures.

“To me, it’s something that can be used by every shop, even if they are DRP-centric. It saves tons of time and automates a manual process that eliminates human error,” Kuehn says.

The BOT software will immediately identify labor operation, line items, non-included operations and other aspects of an estimate that can often be overlooked.

However, embracing technology doesn’t just mean trying out new products. There is plenty of older technology that isn’t being used enough, Kuehn says.

Top amongst those are P-Pages. They’ve been around as long as estimating systems have, but there are people who don’t know how to use them, Kuehn says. Commonly, shops will just use one of the three major systems—Mitchell, CCC or AutoText. Shops should actually be utilizing all three, Kuehn says, as different insurance companies use different systems. If the insurance company’s preferred system doesn’t match with the shop’s, then it’s the shop’s responsibility to match the

paperwork of the other systems. The process of manually copying an estimate from an insurer into the shop’s own estimating system is known as rekeying and can be a large time consumer for estimators. Using all three of the major systems will help mitigate that process by ensuring the estimators know the correct language, which can differ slightly between systems. Rekeying should be avoided whenever possible and should only be acceptable in a scenario in which a customer has already gotten an estimate from another shop.

Additionally, if the shop doesn’t know the other system, it might not know the labor formulas or operations it could be taking advantage of.

Another piece of equipment that isn’t used enough is mobile estimating carts, Kuehn says. Using a mobile cart, the estimator can have three screens up, one looking at the OEM repair procedures, another looking at a parts breakdown and a third in the estimating system. It is one of the easiest resources to help a shop achieve 100 percent disassembly and avoid supplements, but not enough people are using them, Kuehn says.

“Try different technology and make it

work for you,” Kuehn says. “It is very helpful.”

**LAW 4: Be prepared for constant change**

Twining, the collision production manager at Preferred Collision, has worked in the auto body industry for nearly 13 years and took on estimating in 2018. From observing estimators in her earlier years, to just within the four years she has been doing estimates, the job has changed drastically. Understanding ADAS and the processes that make up the systems has been amongst the tougher duties to handle. Twining frequently goes through OEM repair procedures and the news position statements to make sure she is staying on top of the latest vehicle technology.

It goes hand-in-hand with research, but having a pulse on what is changing in OEM procedures is vital, Haynes says. Estimators should be subscribed to industry news outlets and specific manufacturer releases to stay on top of those OEM updates.

The constant change can be difficult. It has been for Twining, and Mette agrees. The most important trait an

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## 6 Laws...

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estimator needs nowadays is patience, Mette says. Reading repair procedures and staying up to date takes up a large chunk of his time. That patience needs to extend to other forms of change. Mette has worked with plenty of different field adjusters and their varying degrees of involvement and knowledge. Plenty of adjusters Mette has worked with recently barely know anything about vehicles. That can make it extra frustrating when they push back and question the estimate that he writes.

“Adjusters are just given guidelines and that’s all they know. A majority of them have no idea. Explain why you’re doing everything for them,” Mette says.

All of that extra effort means estimators hardly ever have a moment to breathe during the day. Keuhn has seen stress amongst estimators increase during his time as a coach. He preaches the idea of a work-life balance and encourages estimators to “just go home” at the end of the day. Of course the work needs to be done, but overworking is going to lead to more mistakes and more work later on. Because of this, he

recommends a 1:1 admin-to-tech ratio. Simply hiring more estimators will lower the stress and increase efficiency, he says.

Still, regardless of the amount of estimators the shop has, dealing with constant change is just part of the job description now, Haynes says. And it’s not slowing down anytime soon.

“We’re at the beginning of things evolving,” Haynes says. “There will be changes in paint, vehicle platforms, motors. Everything. So it’s absolutely necessary that you can change and are watching what’s happening.”

### LAW 5: Achieve 100 percent disassembly from the beginning

Among the top goals for a shop is to achieve 100 percent disassembly. Doing so allows an estimator to complete a full estimate and understand every issue that needs to be addressed. However, achieving 100 percent disassembly has too often become more about checking a box than the actual importance of why it is done, Keuhn says.

“What I see a lot of shops unsuccessfully doing is, rather than concentrating on why something needs

to be removed, they are only focused on reaching 100 percent disassembly,” he says. “A mindset shift is needed.”

It’s not about reaching some magical figure, Keuhn explains. It’s about removing parts to restore corrosion or to access the structure of a vehicle or another of the many reasons a car goes to disassembly in the first place. The main mental motivator shouldn’t be avoiding supplements. It should be about fixing the car correctly. When that is the main motivator, suddenly supplements become less common and 100 percent disassembly is achieved from the beginning more often, Keuhn says.

In practice, that means estimators need to be involved in the process. Keuhn likes to view the estimators as coaches who help guide the disassembly team through the process. Ask leading questions of technicians so you’re working with them rather than forcing them to do something. In the same vein, that collaboration needs to start before disassembly starts and throughout the process, he says.

It also means having disassembly clearly organized. Keuhn recommends keeping the disassembly stall tidy, with

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replacement parts all in one area. Keep a running list of hardware, clips, screws and fasteners and make use of mobile estimating carts. With the estimator providing an extra set of eyes and a different perspective than a technician, that should help achieve 100 percent disassembly, Kuehn says.

"It's something a lot of shops struggle with," Kuehn says.

## LAW 6: Remember who you work for

One of the biggest problems Haynes sees from the estimators is that they confuse their priorities. The No. 1 priority should always be to return the vehicle safely and in as close to pre-collision condition as possible, Haynes says. It is not to be best friends with the insurance companies and save them the most money. It is not to avoid ruffling feathers. If an insurance company isn't covering a repair that fits with your shop's number one priority, an estimator has to be ready to negotiate and not back down.

"Never lose focus for who employed you to do the work," Haynes says. "Many estimators think they are working for the insurance company. No, you work

for the customer. Don't forget who the customer is."

Haynes sees too many estimators who won't challenge insurance companies out of fear. Fear that it won't get approved. Fear that they are souring a relationship with the insurer. Fear that the customer will look badly on the shop if it is at odds with the insurance company. And while Haynes certainly doesn't advocate for conflict, it has become a necessary part of the collision repair process.

"You're the expert, remember that. And you're liable," Haynes says. "If there's an incident after the repair, the insurance companies will step away and it will be on you."

"Stand your ground. They're going to try to push you around," says Mette. "Have the customer involved the entire time so they can understand the insurance doesn't want to pay."

Anytime a shop is getting questions or pushback from insurance companies, Kuehn recommends considering four negotiation questions: Is it required? Is it an included operation? Is there a predetermined time frame this needs to be completed in? And if not, is it worth it?

Those four questions guide Kuehn's teaching of negotiation. If it is required, it should be pursued. If it is an included operation but the insurance company is not accepting it, it should be pursued. If the shop feels the fight is worth it, it should be pursued.

There are three other things to keep in mind, Kuehn says. First, set yourself up well for these conversations through your estimates. The more explaining you can do in the line notes with the addition of quality photos and procedures, the less questions the insurance companies will have. Second, don't fall for the "you're the only one that charges for..."

"There's an interesting thing that I've found as I've been teaching for the last three years," Kuehn says. "For the thousands and thousands of estimators and shops I've talked to, every single one has been told by an insurance company that they are 'the only one that charges for something.' The 'only ones' club is pretty crowded."

For that reason, come with information that supports you're not the only one. Kuehn recommends the "Who Pays for What?" survey, which clearly outlines what percentage of shops charge for what operations. That should quickly debunk the "only ones" argument.

Third, remember that giving a concession as part of a negotiation is part of the job. And that just because you gave that concession once doesn't mean that's the way it has to be every time moving forward. Let the insurance company know that it was the shop's choice not to charge for that this time around. That is not the expectation moving forward.

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## Dad Jokes

What do you call a fake noodle? An Impasta.

Why did the cookie cry?  
 Because his father was a wafer so long!

My cat was just sick on the carpet, I don't think it's feline well. HA HA

Why did the octopus beat the shark in a fight?  
 Because it was well armed.

What did daddy spider say to baby spider?  
 You spend too much time on the web.



There's a new type of broom out, it's sweeping the nation.

What cheese can never be yours? Nacho cheese.



What did the Buffalo say to his little boy when he dropped him off at school? Bison.

How was Rome split in two?  
 With a pair of Ceasars.

A scarecrow says, "This job isn't for everyone, but hay, it's in my jeans."

Did you hear about the guy who lost the left side of his body?  
 He's alright now.

What do you do with a dead chemist? You barium.

I bet the person who created the door knocker won a Nobel prize.

Towels can't tell jokes. They have a dry sense of humor.

What do you call a cow with no legs? Ground beef.

What do you call a cow with two legs? Lean beef.

What do you call a cow with all of its legs? High steaks.



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