



What You Should Know About Replacing Your Car's Windshield

Most people think of the windshield as the part of the car that prevents them from getting hit in the face by bugs and rocks as they drive down the road; but in reality, it serves an even more important purpose.

The windshield is a primary component of your vehicle's safety net. In addition to protecting the driver and passengers from flying debris, the windshield helps support the car's roof, and is a major component of the passenger safety restraint system. Along with the seatbelts and airbags, it helps keep the driver and passengers inside the car in the event of a crash or rollover.

However, if the factory-installed windshield has been replaced and the work was not done properly, it could lead to problems. According to the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (NHTSA), more than 30 percent of the 40,000 Americans killed in highway fatalities every year -- some 12,000 people -- die after either being ejected from the vehicle, or critically injured during rollovers.

"The National Glass Association's (NGA's) review of the NHTSA data confirms a measurable percentage of those fatalities occur when an improperly replaced windshield does not remain firmly bonded to the vehicle during a crash. Unfortunately, the percentage is probably higher than we can document but, often, accident investigators are unable to identify the ejection pathway after the fact," says Leo Cyr, vice president of the National Auto Glass Association's Auto Glass Division.

A "20/20" news story that aired on February 25, 2000, supports that theory. "20/20 experts estimate up to 70 percent of the 12 million windshields replaced each year are done so improperly. Among the mistakes made by unlicensed technicians, not cleaning the new windshield properly before attaching it to the car; not wearing disposable rubber gloves when handling a windshield, allowing oils and dirt from their hands to contaminate the bonding surface; skipping the secondary primer for the windshield, preventing it from fully bonding; using Butyl tape instead of urethane as the bonding agent; and failing to warn the customer that the car is not safe to drive until the adhesive cures.

"After a windshield has been replaced, there is no reliable test to determine if the replacement was done properly and safely," says Cyr. "However, if you notice a water or air leak around the windshield you are well within your rights to ask the windshield be removed and reinstalled."

The NGA has calculated that 5.1 percent of windshields are damaged and require replacement each year. With people keeping their cars longer than ever these days, the chances that you'll need a windshield replacement are good.

If the damage is not too extensive, repair instead of replacement may be a viable and economical option, but a competent technician should be consulted first. The technician can determine if the



damage is an appropriate size for repair; that distortion will not result after the repair; and that the windshield's inner PVB layer has not been penetrated and compromised.

If the technician determines that windshield replacement is necessary, the National Glass Association recommends you:

1. Look for "Technician Certificates" which should be proudly posted in the customer reception area of the Glass shop.
2. Ask if your service provider employs technicians trained and certified?
3. Familiarize yourself with the auto glass industry's [Auto Glass Replacement Safety Standard](#).
4. Ask how long will the job take? If the installer tells you the job can be done in less than an hour, make sure at least two technicians will be working on the car.
5. Ask about the recommended "Safe Drive Away Time" for the urethane adhesive being used. Make sure the shop plans to give the windshield adequate curing time before sending it out on the road.

"A professional installation company will not object to answering any of these questions," says Cyr. "They value their reputation, their commitment to customer safety and want to be sure the consumer is comfortable with the level of service they provide. Unfortunately, many consumers still think all windshield replacement is the same, except for price, and do not ask the questions they should!"