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GEICO Drops Use of Aftermarket Safety Parts

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Effective immediately GEICO policy is OEM-only for bumper reinforcements and related safety parts.

When it comes to safety items such as bumper reinforcements, brackets and energy absorbers that can play an important role in the crash management characteristics of vehicles, GEICO insurance has taken the proactive step of no longer specifying aftermarket replacement parts for these components when repairing their customers' vehicles.

GEICO informed its staff of the companywide policy change this week citing the recent industry dialog surrounding the quality of aftermarket bumper reinforcements.

The company communication states: "As of today, and until further notice, companywide procedure will be to specify only new OEM or recycled OEM bumper reinforcements, absorbers and brackets. It is important that this message be clearly communicated to everyone on your staff."

As an added measure, to avoid even inadvertent use of these parts on GEICO estimates, the company has modified its claims management software to raise an electronic flag informing the adjuster of the new policy. According to the GEICO notice, if an adjuster inappropriately selects an aftermarket replacement for a safety related part, the adjuster will see a prompt that states "Company Policy is OEM or Recycled."

The company communication offered the following explanation, "While we are not aware of any issues relative to reinforcements, absorbers or brackets that appear in the CCC database, we are suspending our current policy on aftermarket bumper reinforcements, absorbers and brackets effective immediately until we can gather additional information."

GEICO also noted that, "Our company continues to support the use of aftermarket parts as competitive, safe part choices in collision damage estimating and repair."

Mounting Industry Concern

The consumer safety implications of using untested aftermarket parts has taken center stage in industry dialog recently after shocking live demonstrations before industry leaders attending recent meetings of the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) focused a spotlight on the issue.

Leaders saw the stark differences between the collision performance of untested aftermarket parts and their OEM equivalents during live demonstrations given in November 2009 and January 2010 by recognized industry repair expert Toby Chess.

Chess gave presentations including video and live demonstrations that clearly illustrated the inferior construction techniques and materials in some aftermarket crash parts that could seriously compromise the crash management characteristics of a vehicle repaired with these parts.

The Auto Body Parts Association (ABPA), who represents more than 150 manufacturers, distributors and suppliers of aftermarket crash parts, was quick to respond. Earlier this week, the ABPA took the unprecedented step of recommending to its members that they discontinue the production and sale of aftermarket safety related parts unless they have sufficient test evidence indicating that the parts will perform equal to the original OEM part in a subsequent vehicle collision. Specifically, the ABPA suggested a review of five categories of parts including bumper reinforcements, bumper brackets, energy absorbers, radiator supports and steel bumpers.

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