



## Stay Alert For Scams: Body Shops Being Targeted

All over the country scam artists are on the prowl for “business opportunities” to steal your money, your credit or your identity. As a business owner or manager you should do everything you can to make your employees aware of the scam artists and report any attempts to scam your business.

Business scams can hurt body shops more than the recession. A few simple security measures and alert employees can prevent the scammers from stealing your hard-earned dollars.

FOX 12 NEWS, KPTV, in Portland, Oregon, recently ran a story about an attempt to scam a body shop in Vancouver, Washington, which has been reported in other news publications. Alpine Auto Body received a phone call from a “would-be customer” asking for help.

The caller was using TTY lines for the hearing impaired, according to Jim McCoy of Alpine Auto Body. The TTY relay service makes their calls untraceable. The caller claimed to be driving to Texas, had an accident, and wanted to have their vehicle towed back to Vancouver for repairs.

Credit cards were not accepted by the towing company, so the caller wanted Alpine Body Shop to “charge \$3,500” on the caller’s Visa card, then wire \$3,500 to them in Texas.

Being ever-vigilant and alert to possible scams, Alpine managers didn’t fall for this scheme. McCoy says, “There’s a lot of scamming with insurance checks out there so we’re always aware... have your ears open when something like this comes up.” Similar con attempts are being made now. Be alert to this scam.

In Madison, Ohio, Doug Pike of Pike’s Carstar got the call. I spoke with Doug as he recounted virtually the same scenario as the Alpine call. A call came from a woman who said she was calling for a deaf man, in a Cadillac Escalade, stranded in Texas due to an accident. According to the caller, the man’s uncle, the owner of the Escalade, lives near Madison, Ohio and wants the vehicle towed back to Pike’s Carstar. Pike said the call was “very cumbersome.” The caller/translator asked him to “speak slowly” so she could “type the message” to the deaf man and wait for his typed reply. When Pike asked questions and said “Let’s repeat. Now, what is your name?” the woman hung up. Click!

Because he was cautious, Pike didn’t get scammed. “It just didn’t seem right,” he said. Although he didn’t get scammed this time, Pike did fall prey to a “Drug prevention brochure” scam about ten years ago. He received a call then asking for a

“donation” of \$25 to help pay for publication of the drug prevention brochure. He mailed his check to a post office box in Cleveland. He later learned that the brochure was just a scam. By the time he found out, the post office box was closed and the scammers were long gone.

Here are some others:

• **From Los Angeles:** We received a TTY relay phone call from a person in Chicago, who said he wanted to send his Honda Accord to be repaired [at our shop], while he would be in the hospital at UCLA for surgery for his hearing. He would then drive it home after his recovery and the repairs were completed. He wanted us to do an over-the-phone, estimate for the repairs he described and from e-mailed photos of his car showing the damage. All we had to do was charge his credit card for the initial estimate charges of \$1700 and add the transport fees of \$800 but send the money via Western Union, in advance, to the transport company in Chicago, as they do not accept credit cards.

He spoke through the operator/TTY system and subsequently via e-mail. He SEEMED honest when hearing his story through the TTY operator and then reading it via-e-mail. But if he had to talk to me himself and I was able to hear his voice, I probably would have known right away this was a fantastic scam. (For the record, I am a woman, and have empathy for everyone.) What saved me from going forward with this, was the fact that our new Quickbooks credit card account through my PC was just being established and we had not even performed transaction one. I told him he would have to wait until the following week. I guess that would delay his program too long or require credit card information he would not have and I never heard from him again. Thank Goodness! At the time we could have used the \$2500.00. But just imagine the consequences if we had wired the \$800.00 to the “transport” company in Chicago, never saw the car or the man, and then have our first credit card transaction be a fraudulent one! BEWARE OUT THERE!

• **From Cheyenne, Wyoming:** I received two calls just like this. The first time I was on the phone for 15 minutes after finally telling the ‘Relay’ lady that her person had to have someone else call me directly not using the relay service. Surprise, surprise, nobody called back. The second time I received the phone call I just hung up. But, it was the same story; She needed a vehicle towed from Texas to Cheyenne to have “body work” done. I wonder if there is a way to follow up with the relay service and

track these people down? [The answer is NO! TTY calls are not traceable.]

• **From North Carolina:** We received two of these same kind of calls... they were wanting us to pick up a vehicle from Texas and bring it to North Carolina to paint it all over. HANG THE PHONE UP if you get any of these calls.

• **From Maryland:** I received a call like this to tow an Escalade from Florida to Silver Spring, MD. Having dealt with [legitimate] relay users I knew it was a fake relay call. They wanted me to charge \$2500 [to their credit card] and wire \$2000 to a ‘tow company’ keeping \$500 as a deposit. I suspect a stolen card was part of this scam. I asked for an email address and sent a message. Still waiting for a reply. DON’T FALL FOR THIS low-life scam.

• **From Pennsylvania:** We also received the same phone call from a deaf man with a translator wanting his 2008 truck towed from Texas to our shop in PA. He offered to give us a credit card to pay for towing service to bring car up from Texas and then we were supposed to write a check to the towing company in return. Hope nobody got scammed on this one...

• **From Nevada:** I got the same call, quite a few months ago. I do not remember all of the conversation but it was pretty much all of the above. The caller hung up on me when I questioned the payment before any repairs or seeing the vehicle.

Scott Wilborn, co-owner of Precision Collision in Raleigh, North Carolina said he received an email regarding a ‘96 Honda Accord that he interpreted to be a scam, so he didn’t respond and deleted the email.

When told about the number of scams like this being targeted at body shops and the millions of dollars being made by the scam artists, Wilborn had more comments. “Well that is bad but not nearly as bad as the untold millions some insurers have scammed from consumers and body shops by refusing to pay for proper repairs.” He went on to give examples of insurers refusing to pay for color, sand, and buff, masking time and other “necessary procedures” required to properly repair a vehicle. “It’s just not right,” Wilborn said.

Consumers and body shops alike must be ever aware that scammers are doing everything they can to get their hands on your hard-earned money. As the economy deteriorates, consumer groups warn that the number of scams will grow.

A spokesperson for the Independent Auto Body Association says, “The basic lesson is ‘Don’t do it’—it’s time to stop being a good-hearted fool.”

Ways to protect your business from phone scams. If you receive a phone call:

- be cautious: if you have doubts about a caller—hang-up
  - never send any money in order to receive something—prize, etc.
  - never give out private financial information
- How to spot a scam:
- if it sounds too good to be true, it is
  - you are often asked for money up front to release your ‘win’
  - you are asked for your bank account, credit card details or other confidential information
  - the caller is more excited than you
  - the stranger who calls wants to be your best friend
  - you must reply right away or the money will be given to someone else.

### Copy of email sent to Precision Collision

Scott Wilborn  
Precision Collision Repair Center Inc.  
(919) 554-8588  
(919) 570-6273 fax  
From: Cole Andrew [mailto:andrewraystore@yahoo.com]  
Sent: Thursday, February 05, 2009  
Subject: Car-Damage-Area

*Hi Manager/Owner, I am sending you an email as a Auto Work Shop Because I want to rebuild my car... I left this car in the Parking garage for years but I would like to give this car a new look. I got a hit run incident on my parked 1996 Honda Accord 4-door LX, caused damage to the front driver’s side door (see attached picture) [deleted]. Rest of the car is mostly intact. If the door can be replaced along with the damaged wiring, that should take care of the necessary repairs, with some internal or functional damage has occurred. What would be the approximate cost estimate for the repair? and I want you to fix in another Bug shield. I want to know the cost estimate to get this car rebuilt. I am ready to pay a deposit fee with my Credit card and I do have a shipping agent that will be available to bring down the car to your workshop once we have agree once terms and payment conditions.*

*Here is more information you will need: Year 1996, Make Honda, Model Accord VIN 1HGCD5655TA050961 Engine 2.2-liter VTEC engine Color Green, Interior Grey Body Style Sedan (4 Door) Transmission Automatic 4 Speed Insurance: No insurance document available about the car*

Best Regards,  
Cole Andrew