

CollisionWeek

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EPA to Shops: Don' Let Passed Deadline Prevent Compliance

Collision Industry Conference: EPA rep advises attendees, aftermarket parts industry presents their own test results.

The Environmental Protection Agency brought a simple message to the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) in mid-March: It's time to comply with the agency's new refinish and paint stripping regulations.

Deborah Craig, an EPA compliance officer, said that even though the deadline has passed for shops to comply, any business that has not complied should not avoid doing so.

"Some folks think if they hang back and don't submit the paperwork that somehow EPA isn't going to know about them," Craig said.

"They don't want to shine a light on themselves by submitting something late. Our recommendation is that you just move forward as quickly as possible to come into compliance. Give the regional EPA folks a call. Ask for help in filling out the forms. Talk to folks in your trade group for assistance. Talk to your paint suppliers. A lot of the paint suppliers have really been offering such excellent customer service by helping you comply."

If concern about the environment and worker safety don't prompt you to comply, the potential fines for not doing so just may, Craig said.

"Under the Clean Air Act, EPA can commence a civil action and levy \$37,500 per day per violation," Craig said. "So if you didn't file initial notification, and didn't file notice of compliance status, and don't have 98-percent (booth) filters, those violations and fines can really add up."

Craig did say such fines are always negotiable, and that the EPA will often significantly reduce fines if a company comes into compliance quickly. But contacting the EPA - rather than having the agency contact you - is generally a better way to avoid hefty fines.

A number of industry groups as well as participants at CIC have

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grumbled about what they see as unnecessary exemptions from the rules for "hobbyists" or those using spray guns with a 3-ounce-or-smaller paint cup. In response to questions about whether these are "loopholes" allowing some to avoid compliance, Craig said only that the EPA is aware of, and looking into, the concerns.

Non-OEM parts debate continues

Also at CIC, held in Secaucus, N.J., the Auto Body Parts Association (ABPA), which represents manufacturers and distributors of non-OEM parts, worked to respond to concerns raised at CIC in the past 18 months about non-OEM structural parts.

Eileen Sottile of the ABPA recapped how the association has done its own crash testing of non-OEM bumper parts, and even sawed through parts much as Toby Chess did at CIC in November 2009, which touched off the latest skirmish in the long battle about the parts. As ABPA reported at the time of that testing, Sottile said all of the findings indicate that non-OEM bumper parts are safe.

"Regardless of whether there might be a variance of particular quality relating to a particular part, or in the composition or the weight of that part, you'll find from our presentation that it makes absolutely no difference in terms of the deployment of the airbag or injury to the occupant of the vehicle," Sottile said.

Peter Byrne of Injurytek, an engineering consulting firm hired by the ABPA and specializing in auto part analysis and occupant injury simulation, said he reviewed crash-test data presented at CIC by Ford Motor Company in November and came to a very different conclusion than the automaker. He said he believes the information Ford presented showed the non-OEM part crash tested absorbed 15 percent more - not less, as Ford contended of the crash energy.

A small acceleration spike in the data that Byrne presumes used to question the non-OEM part's performance "wouldn't be sufficient to deploy a robustly engineered airbag system.

"If that were the case, every time you hit a pothole or a rut, your airbags would deploy," Byrne said.

But CIC attendees challenged many of the conclusions ABPA made in its presentation. Chess, for example, said the ABPA video shows that it could cut through a bumper bar for a 2008 Toyota Corolla as easily as the non-OEM replacement part for that vehicle. But, Chess said, he had compared the parts for a 2009 Corolla, in which the OEM part is made of a different metal than the earlier model.

Paul Massey of Ford reiterated that his company's crash testing convinced Ford engineers that the use of the non-OEM parts tested "will increase the likelihood of airbags deploying when they shouldn't."

"Maybe we should get you in touch with our engineers," Massey told Byrne.

Other discussion at the meeting

-Industry trainer Chess also presented information on the need to recalibrate the steering angle sensor that is part of the electronic stability control system on an increasing number of new vehicles. Such systems are standard equipment on 85 percent of 2010 new vehicles, and will be required on all new vehicles as of model year 2012. The recalibration is an additional procedure that must be done after the vehicle alignment. "It's an added step, and there's also no more 2-wheel alignments with these systems. That won't work," Chess said. He said even though no "trouble light" will be lit on the dash and the vehicle may handle properly under normal driving conditions even if the system is not calibrated, the electronic stability control function may not work properly in a subsequent "emergency maneuver."

-The CIC Repair Standards Advisory Committee said it hopes in April to hire a consultant to help build a business case for a new organization that would oversee the development and implementation of formalized collision repair standards in the United States. For a number of years, an all-volunteer CIC committee has discussed and crafted some portions of a possible standard, which would address training, equipment and even repair procedures. The consultant will work with the committee to conduct the interviews and research necessary to propose a structure and funding mechanism for an organization that would use a formal process to create and implement the standards. The consultant's report, expected by early fall, would also outline the value such standards would offer various segments of the industry, and how the performance of the standards could be measured.

-An informal collection of cash donations from the approximately 150 people at the meeting raised more than \$1,600 for the Japanese Red Cross to support efforts to help that country following the earthquakes and March 11 tsunami.

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