

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR VEHICLE'S SAFETY SYSTEM

If you've been involved in an accident in which one or more of your vehicle's airbags deployed, you probably appreciate more than most people the added safety and protection these seemingly simple devices offer. In fact, you may be one of the more than 5,000 people whose lives, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), have been saved because of vehicle airbags.

But airbags won't effectively do their job of protecting you and other occupants in your vehicle unless you do your part before – and, just as importantly, after – you're in an accident that triggers airbag deployment. Here are some tips to help you get the most protection from your vehicle's safety systems.

- Check the owner's manual for your vehicle to make sure you understand what the airbag light on the instrument panel is telling you. Generally, if the airbag light is ON (other than briefly when you first start the vehicle), there's a problem with the system that should be checked right away
- Although 1998 and newer vehicles have redesigned airbags that reduce the chance of injuries from airbag deployment, it is always best not to sit too close to an airbag. Drivers should move their seat rearward as far as they can without impeding their ability to see the road ahead and to reach the steering wheel and pedals. (Try to ensure there is at least 10 inches between the steering wheel and the driver's chest.) Don't lean forward as you drive. If your vehicle has a tilt steering wheel, tilt it downward so the airbag will deploy toward the driver's chest, not the head.
- All 1998 and newer cars (and 1999 or newer light trucks) also have passenger-side airbags. All front-seat passengers – not just those who are shorter or elderly – should also move their seat as far rearward as possible to maximize the distance between their chest and the instrument panel to give the airbag room to deploy safely.
- NHTSA recommends placing all children 12 and under in the rear seat. It's the safest place for children in vehicles with or without airbags. Never place a child in a safety seat in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side airbag.

- A deployed airbag cannot be "repacked." In fact, the bag and many of the system's parts are not "repairable." They must be replaced. The parts are designed for each specific vehicle. For the system to function correctly in another collision, the proper parts must be purchased and installed by a qualified technician.
- Airbags won't protect you as well if you're not also wearing a seat belt. They work together as a system. Some vehicle seat belts have a device that automatically tightens the seat belt in the event of a crash; as with an airbag, once it deploys, it must be replaced. Also, in severe crashes, the webbing fabric of the seatbelt may become stretched, which could affect its restraining ability in a subsequent collision. Ask to have your seat belts checked after an accident.

In choosing a repair facility, look for evidence that their technicians have been properly trained. Many insurance companies and repair facility associations recommend you look for a business that has earned the I-CAR® Gold Class Professionals® designation. The Gold Class designation indicates that a repair facility's employees have completed a substantial amount of training. They are up-to-date in collision repair knowledge and technology. I-CAR training covers virtually every step of the repair process. This includes analyzing the damage, structural repair processes, corrosion protection, matching your vehicle's paint finish, and checking safety features such as airbag deployment, seatbelts and anti-lock braking systems. I-CAR established the Gold Class Professionals designation to help consumers identify repair facilities that have invested in proper training.

For the location of a Gold Class Professionals shop near you, visit the I-CAR website at [www.i-car.com](http://www.i-car.com) or call 800.422-7872.