RCAR

Research Council for Automobile Repairs

Newsletter

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From the Secretary-General

Hello Again!

Hard to believe that in a few short months we will be meeting again for our Annual Conference – this time in Merida, Mexico. This year, the event will be hosted by CESVI Mexico!

I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend. The Conference provides an excellent opportunity for discussing issues of mutual interest, as well as a unique opportunity to network with like-minded professionals from companies and countries throughout the world. That's the advantage of being a member of the RCAR family!

Once again, judging from the number of quality submissions received, as listed to the right, the current edition of the Newsletter should prove interesting, informative, and valuable to all!

In this edition, you will find a trio of submissions from IIHS on electric cars, red-light cameras, and large truck under-ride; two offerings from Centro Zarigoza on their new presence in Turkey and recent fair participation; an informative piece from Samsung on their recent seminar for insurers and repairers; three articles from CESVIMAP on electric vehicles, university qualifications, and professional training; a contribution from KTI Germany on the influence of driver assistance systems on repair costs; an entry from JIKEN on their presentation at the JSAE Spring Congress; offerings from CESVI Brasil on Traffic Safety and Suzuki Crash Testing; a report from CESVI Mexico on their participation in the 2nd Ibero-American Meeting on Road Safety; a press release from AZT on accidents involving tractors; two features from KART on rising repair costs and KART's traffic safety campaign; a detailed article from Allstate/Tech-Cor on testing of aftermarket VIN labels; offerings from Thatcham on their AEB Event and their Thailand Contract; a short piece from AXA on the award received by them at the eSafety Challenge 2011; two submissions from State Farm on the subjects of VCAT research and teen driver errors, and s series of updates from MRC Malaysia. Our final submission for the current Newsletter is from CESVI Argentina, on cooperation with Citroen for greater road safety.

My sincere thanks to all who contributed! Your participation is always greatly appreciated.

Enjoy!

Of Special Interest:

Inside This Issue:

From ALLSTATE/TECH-COR:

TESTING THE ACCURACY OF COMPETITIVE AFTERMARKET REPLACEMENT VIN LABELS

In January 2011, Tech-Cor determined a need to review and test the accuracy of competitive aftermarket replacement vehicle identification/certification (VIN) labels utilized in the repair process in the U.S. market. This inquiry was precipitated by concerns from Allstate Insurance Company and repair shops affiliated with their direct repair program.

The replacement of "VIN" certification labels located on doors, pillars and posts is typically considered to be difficult, and sometimes impossible to obtain. Often-times, the certification label is cut off the damaged panel and retained in the vehicle by the owner. These damaged labels can provide legal proof of ownership in addition to critical information that is found on the label. This information could include gross vehicle weight, tire size and pressure information, paint and interior color codes, vehicle options, safety information, and important technical information.

Each state has requirements that must be followed if the label or tag is damaged or replaced. This further complicates the problem due to lack of consistency between jurisdictions.

From an industry perspective, there are many concerns regarding the lack of availability of these labels during the repair process. Some of these include:

- Lack of "pre-accident" conditional repairs
- Potential for diminished value
- Missing critical vehicle information needed for repairs and maintenance
- State specific regulations may not be met

During our investigation, Tech-Cor contacted many of the auto manufacturers regarding their processes to obtain these labels as well as the availability of the product. What we found relating to individual OEM processes and protocols was:

- Some OEMs do not service these labels
- There is no "standard"
- In some cases, the OEM will not supply the part for all models
- Some OEMs require the involvement of a factory representative for confirmation of legitimacy
- Excessive time lines to obtain the label or tag
- Some OEMs have limitations for specific model years
- May require submission or referral to a state Motor Vehicle Department

Based on these initial findings, Tech-Cor's test focused on the three most prevalent vendors utilized by repairers in the U.S. marketplace. These vendors have the ability to service and reproduce many types of labels, including VIN certification labels via a digital image supplied by the repairer or customer. The three vendors were:

- *Autodata Labels*: Deer Park, New York
- *ECS Automotive Concepts*: Wildwood, Missouri
- *Automotive ID*: St. Louis, Missouri

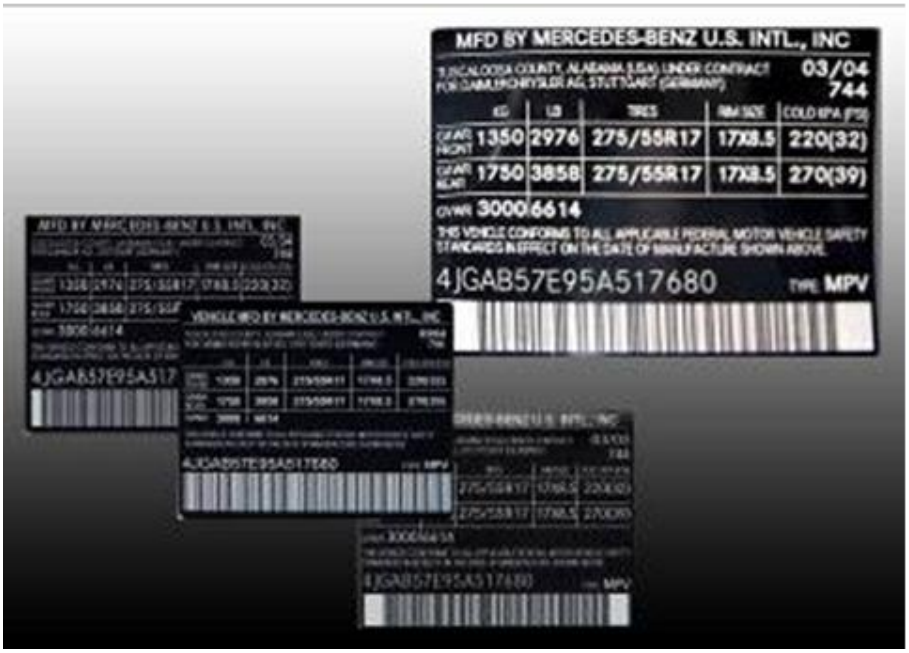
Test #1:

The first sample sent to the three vendors was for a 2010 Honda Civic. This vehicle was not in a collision and had no prior loss history. Due to the curvature of the panel, the corners of the image submitted were "soft" and slightly different from the main image, yet it was deemed acceptable by all three companies.

All replacement labels were delivered within five days. Of the three companies, *ECS Automotive Concepts* provided the most accurate label in terms of font, color, size, and actual label material utilized compared to the other two which revealed subtle differences.

The barcode font was decoded properly on all samples returned; however, our scanner read the ECS code to include the letter **"I"** in front of the "VIN" on each sample tested. Speculation is that this was caused by a program font error or copyright difference.

Test #2:



The second test sample decoded a 2005 Mercedes-Benz M-Class ML350, SUV.

The label presented had damage to the substrate the label was attached to, which could be the typical scenario of what a repairer might submit. The damage to the substrate caused a visible distortion in the digital image. While we had concerns with this issue and the ultimate impact on what was returned, it did not present a problem to any of these companies

The replacement labels were received back within five days. A closer inspection of the replacement labels revealed varying degrees of inaccuracies. The overall size, color and material type of the *Autodata* and *Automotive ID* labels were the most inconsistent to the original, and had unreadable barcodes.

The word “VEHICLE” was added to the top line on the label received by *Automotive ID*.

Again, the closest match was provided by *ECS Automotive Concepts*. Their font size, label size, label material and color were the most accurate to the original label and, to our surprise, included the OE watermarking, which made it appear to be a near-perfect duplicate. However, although the overall quality was exceptional, *ECS* failed to provide the accurate production date of 03/04. Their label had a production date of 03/03.

Test #3:

The third example was a “VIN” certification label located on the door inner panel of a 2008 Dodge Ram 1500 pick-up. The vehicle was in a prior loss and the VIN label had been “taped” or “masked” around for the refinish process. The result was overspray on the edges of the label, but again acceptable for submission by all three vendors.

In addition the “VIN” plate submitted had been altered with similar VIN information downloaded from the internet. This alteration was done to determine if any of the vendors had processes in place via a “VIN” decode to prevent vehicle cloning or criminal intent.

On the original label, the vehicle production date decodes appropriately as a 2008, while the on-line “VIN” utilized decoded as a 2007. This was not picked up by any of the three suppliers.

Closer examination of the replacement labels from both *Autodata Labels* and *Automotive ID* reveals that they are mis-formatted, and include the addition of **“VEH”** and **”VEHICLE”** in the top line. These labels were also inconsistent in color, font, size, and label material.

The closest match again was provided by *ECS Automotive Concepts;* however the character spacing was off due to missing the **U.S.A** abbreviation in the center section of the label. Overall, their label quality, font size, and type appeared to be a close match to the sample submitted.

Additional information and complete whitepaper is available upon request.