

Complaint Case Study

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Bureau of Automotive Repair

BAR Field Office Support

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://bar.ca.gov/contact-us>. The page features a navigation bar with the BAR logo and menu items: Consumers, Licensees, Industry, Information, Online Services, and Search. A dark blue header contains social media icons, a search bar, and utility links: Contact Us, Settings, Translate, and Accessibility. The main content area is divided into three columns:

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Complaint Background

- Repair History:
 - Fall 2022 – Alternator replaced at first ARD
 - Spring 2023 – Charge light illuminates
 - Second ARD recommended alternator to solve charge light
 - Alternator replaced but light remained illuminated
 - Battery sensor replaced and harness connector repaired
 - Spring 2023 – within days, light re-illuminates
 - Second ARD replaces wiring harness
 - Customer files complaint with BAR in spring 2023

Complaint Investigation

- Complaint filed against first ARD
- BAR representative reviews documentation from both ARDs
- BAR determined three separate repair transactions took place
- Multiple compliance concerns identified at both locations

First Repair Transaction

- Alternator and starter replaced at first ARD
- Customer requested both due to no-start
- BAR determined ARD installed incorrect alternator
 - Manual transmission application installed on automatic transmission vehicle
 - Only difference is 'over-running' clutch on pulley for automatic transmission application
 - Clutch used to reduce noise, vibration, and harshness

Second Repair Transaction

- Second ARD recommended alternator replacement due to incorrect application
- Upon replacement of alternator, ARD determined battery sensor was not generating correct signal
- Recommended sensor replacement
- Upon replacement of sensor, identified broken connector and attempted to repair
- Illuminated charge light was resolved by these repairs

Third Repair Transaction

- Shortly after leaving second ARD, charge light re-illuminated
- Second ARD determined connector repair had failed and recommended harness replacement
- Customer authorized harness replacement
- Customer retrieved vehicle and paid more than \$2,300 for repairs

BAR Findings – First Repair Transaction

- Customer requested first ARD provide a full refund of all monies spent at the second ARD
- Based upon BAR's determination that the incorrect alternator was installed, the first ARD offered to refund the amount spent (over \$500) on the alternator only
- Customer felt the refund amount was insufficient and declined the settlement offer

BAR Findings – Second Repair Transaction (1 of 3)

- Review of the invoice from the second ARD displayed the statement, “voltage spikes from incorrect alternator caused battery sensor and harness failure”
 - Invoice did not list alternator test results
- Customer based their decision to decline the settlement offer from the first ARD based on this statement
- The statement by the second ARD negatively influenced the customer’s ability to make an informed decision

BAR Findings – Second Repair Transaction (2 of 3)

- During the complaint investigation, the BAR representative interviewed the second ARD's technician, who stated:
 - He performed the alternator replacement, battery sensor replacement, and attempted to repair the connector
 - During the connector repair, he determined the battery 'hold-down' was missing
 - He determined the missing hold-down was likely the cause of the sensor and connector failure
 - This information was not listed on the technician's notes or invoice
 - The harness replacement was performed by another technician at the second ARD

BAR Findings – Second Repair Transaction (3 of 3)

- BAR inspected the vehicle and determined the following:
 - There was **NOT** an aftermarket hold-down, or any hold-down, on the vehicle
 - There was sufficient ‘flex’ in the harness to allow for battery movement without harness damage
 - BAR was unable to determine the condition and flex of the harness prior to replacement
 - The correct alternator was now installed
 - There is no evidence that the alternator was defective other than the incorrect pulley application
- As a gesture of goodwill and due to the multiple false and misleading statements made by employees, the second ARD refunded the entire amount (over \$2,300) spent at their facility

Moral of the Story

- **BE COMPLETELY OPEN AND HONEST WITH CUSTOMERS, EVEN IF IT'S "BAD" NEWS!**

Contact Information

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