

191—15.43 (507B) Standards for settlement of automobile insurance claims.**15.43(1) Loss calculation and deviation guidelines.**

a. Loss calculation. When the insurance policy provides for the adjustment and settlement of first-party automobile total losses on the basis of actual cash value or replacement with another automobile of like kind and quality, one of the following methods shall apply:

(1) The insurer may elect to offer a replacement automobile that is at least comparable in that it will be by the same manufacturer, same or newer year, similar body style, similar options and mileage as the insured vehicle and in as good or better overall condition and available for inspection at a licensed dealer within a reasonable distance of the insured's residence. All applicable taxes, license fees and other fees incident to the transfer of evidence of ownership of the automobile shall be paid by the insurer, at no cost to the insured, other than any deductible provided in the policy. The offer and any rejection thereof must be documented in the claim file.

(2) The insurer may elect a cash settlement based upon the actual cost, less any deductible provided in the policy, to purchase a comparable automobile including all applicable taxes, license fees and other fees incident to transfer of evidence of ownership of a comparable automobile. Such cost may be derived from:

1. The cost of two or more comparable automobiles in the local market area when comparable automobiles are available or were available within the last 90 days to consumers in the local market area; or

2. The cost of two or more comparable automobiles in areas proximate to the local market area, including the closest major metropolitan areas within or without the state, that are available or were available within the last 90 days to consumers when comparable automobiles are not available in the local market area; or

3. One of two or more quotations obtained by the insurer from two or more licensed dealers located within the local market area when the cost of comparable automobiles is not available; or

4. Any source for determining statistically valid fair market values that meet all of the following criteria:

- The source shall give primary consideration to the values of vehicles in the local market area and may consider data on vehicles outside the area.

- The source's database shall produce values for at least 85 percent of all makes and models for the last 15 model years taking into account the values of all major options for such vehicles.

- The source shall produce fair market values based on current data available from the area surrounding the location where the insured vehicle was principally garaged or a necessary expansion of parameters (such as time and area) to ensure statistical validity.

(3) If the insurer is notified within 35 days of the receipt of the claim draft that the insured cannot purchase a comparable vehicle for such market value, the insured shall have a right of recourse. The insurer shall reopen its claim file and the following procedure(s) shall apply:

1. The insurer may locate a comparable vehicle by the same manufacturer, same or newer year, similar body style and similar options and price range for the insured for the market value determined by the insurer at the time of settlement. Any such vehicle must be available through a licensed dealer; or

2. The insurer shall either pay the insured the difference between the market value before applicable deductions and the cost of the comparable vehicle of like kind and quality which the insured has located, or negotiate and effect the purchase of this vehicle for the insured; or

3. The insurer may elect to offer a replacement in accordance with the provisions set forth in subrule 15.43(1); or

4. The insurer may conclude the loss settlement as provided for under the appraisal section of the insurance contract in force at the time of loss. This appraisal shall be considered as binding against both parties, but shall not preclude or waive any other rights either party has under the insurance contract or a common law.

The insurer is not required to take action under this subrule if its documentation to the insured at the time of settlement included written notification of the availability and location of a specified and comparable vehicle of the same manufacturer, same or newer year, similar body style and similar options in as good or better condition as the total-loss vehicle which could have been purchased for the market value determined by the insurer before applicable deductions. The documentation shall include the vehicle identification number.

b. Deviation. When a first-party automobile total loss is settled on a basis which deviates from the methods described in paragraph “a,” the deviation must be supported by documentation giving particulars of the automobile’s condition. Any deductions from such cost, including deduction for salvage, must be measurable, discernible, itemized and specified as to dollar amount and shall be appropriate in amount. The basis for such settlement shall be fully explained to the first-party claimant.

15.43(2) Where liability and damages are reasonably clear, an insurer shall not recommend that third-party claimants make claims under their own policies solely to avoid paying claims under the insurer’s policy.

15.43(3) The insurer shall not require a claimant to travel an unreasonable distance either to inspect a replacement automobile, to obtain a repair estimate or to have the automobile repaired at a specific repair shop.

15.43(4) The insurer shall, upon the claimant’s request, include the first-party claimant’s deductible, if any, in subrogation demands. Subrogation recoveries shall be shared on a proportionate basis with the first-party claimant, unless the deductible amount has been otherwise recovered. No deduction for expenses shall be made from the deductible recovery unless an outside attorney is retained to collect such recovery. The deduction may then be for only a pro-rata share of the allocated loss adjustment expense.

15.43(5) Vehicle repairs. If partial losses are settled on the basis of a written estimate prepared by or for the insurer, the insurer shall supply the insured a copy of the estimate upon which the settlement is based. The estimate prepared by or for the insurer shall be reasonable, in accordance with applicable policy provisions, and of an amount which will allow for repairs to be made in a workmanlike manner. If the insured subsequently claims, based upon a written estimate which the insured obtains, that necessary repairs will exceed the written estimate prepared by or for the insurer, the insurer shall (1) pay the difference between the written estimate and a higher estimate obtained by the insured, or (2) promptly provide the insured with the name of at least one repair shop that will make the repairs for the amount of the written estimate. If the insurer designates only one or two such repair shops, the insurer shall ensure that the repairs are performed according to automobile industry standards. The insurer shall maintain documentation of all such communications.

15.43(6) When the amount claimed is reduced because of betterment or depreciation, all information for such reduction shall be contained in the claim file. Such deductions shall be itemized and specified as to dollar amount and shall be appropriate for the amount of deductions.

15.43(7) When the insurer elects to repair an automobile, the insurer shall cause the damaged automobile to be restored to its condition prior to the loss at no additional cost to the claimant other than as stated in the policy, within a reasonable period of time.

15.43(8) Storage and towing. The insurer shall provide reasonable notice to an insured prior to termination of payment for automobile storage charges. The insurer shall provide reasonable time for the insured to remove the vehicle from storage prior to the termination of payment. Unless the insurer has provided an insured with the name of a specific towing company prior to the insured’s use of another towing company, the insurer shall pay all reasonable towing charges.

15.43(9) Betterment. Betterment deductions are allowable only if the deductions reflect a measurable decrease in market value attributable to the poorer condition of, or prior damage to, the vehicle. Betterment deductions must be measurable, itemized, specified as to dollar amount and documented in the claim file.

15.43(10) Diminished value. Rescinded IAB 4/28/04, effective 4/7/04.