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Repairing Your Windshield: A FOX Undercover Investigation

This Fox Undercover investigation is one every driver must see, because thousands of you may be driving around with a potential danger right in front of your eyes.

Thousands of shattered windshields are replaced every year in the Bay state.

But there is a problem.

And chances are, it's happened to you. You get a crack in your windshield and you call a glass company to replace it.

Here in Massachusetts, about 350,000 windshields are replaced every year. And although it is a complicated job that requires skill and training, installers do not have to be licensed or certified. And experts say those installers are making mistakes.

Mistakes you may never know about until it is too late.

Jeanne Fransway was just 25 years-old when her car veered off a Wisconsin road two years ago.

911 Call: There is a really bad accident down the road. There is a car rolled and another smashed up and it looks pretty bad.

Witnesses calling 911 could not find her inside the vehicle.

911 Call: The car is in a ditch and I do not know where the person is, but there is a shoe in the middle of the road. I do not see a passenger.

Jeanne's body was found 70 feet away lying on top of the windshield which had popped out as her car rolled over.

Jon Fransway: It is hard because we were all there when she died. So no matter about all the good times that you can think of, you know, there is still a lot of pain.

Experts believe the windshield in Jeanne's car was not properly installed.

Mitch Becker: What you see is the adhesive that holds the windshield in place and you can see where it just lets go. It is not the adhesive that had a problem. It is the whole installation process and the way the person used it failed.

In crash tests, you can see how the windshield will keep you inside a car. When properly installed, the windshield will deflect the airbag and keep the roof from caving in on you.

But if the glass pops out, you can be thrown from the car — which greatly increases your chance of dying.

Experts tell Fox Undercover that windshields are often replaced improperly because many installers are either sloppy or have not been trained well enough. So we decided to find out for ourselves how area glass companies stack up when it comes to looking out for your safety.

Fox Undercover took three cars and had their windshield replaced by three different glass companies. Time after time, we found examples of what could be a deadly problem.

We watched as the installer from Executive Auto Glass gets down to business. He has no idea that one of his customers is Vincent Salluzzo — president of National Associates for Safe Auto Glass Replacement.

Salluzzo said he spotted several significant mistakes.

Salluzzo: I do not think you can do it properly outdoors, anything below 40 degrees.

Salluzzo says it is especially risky when it is below 40 degrees. When it is cold outside, it takes longer for the adhesive to dry. And when the adhesive is not dry, your windshield is not secure.

The installer should be using a more expensive two-part glue that dries faster. But he was not, despite a warning from the manufacturer not to use the type of glue he was using in temperatures below 40 degrees.

Salluzzo: When they do it outdoors, in cold weather, using the wrong adhesive compromises safety.

And he did not remove the cowl — the panel between the hood and the windshield. It is a short cut Salluzzo says could cost you your life.

Salluzzo: By having to slide it under the cowl, the urethane hits the edge and you do not get the surface bond like you would if you set it down.

The installer told us our car would be safe to drive in one hour. But two hours later, Salluzzo pressed on the glass and there was the windshield.

Mike Beaudet: Is this windshield safe?

Salluzzo: Absolutely not. It is inconceivable to even describe it as safe. This car will not be safe to drive in probably a week, 10 days, two weeks or who knows when.

The president of Executive Auto Glass agreed to talk to Fox Undercover about what happened. But then backed out.

In a faxed statement, he said: The technician profiled on Fox did not follow proper installation procedures. We have zero tolerance for any errors of this kind. As a result, this person has been terminated.

The installer from Giant Glass replaced our windshield in less than 20 minutes.

Salluzzo: If speed is what counts, the guy was the best. World class. But I do not think speed is what counts.

What counts is safety. It was 35 degrees outside and the installer used the wrong kind of glue. And because he did not remove the cowl, he had to jam the windshield inside. And that means it is not as secure as it should be.

The installer told us our car would be safe to drive as soon as he finished the job. And that the car would be okay, as long as we did not go through a car wash in the next two days.

Salluzzo: In a rollover, there is no question the roof would have crushed, had the airbag gone off it would have gone off across the street. We can virtually lift it off the car at this point.

Beaudet: Did this guy cut corners?

Salluzzo: Oh, absolutely. Nobody should be driving this car.

Beaudet: Would you want to be driving this car?

Salluzzo: No, nobody should be driving this car.

In a faxed statement to Fox Undercover, the general manager for Giant Glass tells us that they have never had an instance or problem of liability related to one of their installations. He goes on to say that OEM glass and high quality adhesive systems were used in the installation.

And the company has taken the opportunity to redouble their training efforts and reinforce to their employees that it is imperative to make sure they complete quality work.

Our last windshield was replaced by an installer who works for Settles Glass. Like the others, he did not remove the cowl. But he taped it up so it was out of the way.

Salluzzo: This installer, I thought, was pretty conscientious. I thought he did the very best he could under the conditions he had to work under. One of the first things he did was warn us not to drive the car for an hour and 15 minutes.

But that warning is wrong. While the adhesive that was used is supposed to dry in cold temperatures, the manufacturer says the car is not safe to drive for at least two hours.

Fox Undercover repeatedly asked Settles for an on-camera interview, but no one returned our calls.

Beaudet: Overall, how would you characterize the job these companies did?

Salluzzo: None of these cars are safe to drive. It is as simple as that.

And Salluzzo says the glass companies are not the only ones to blame. He says the real culprits are the insurance companies that do not want to pay glass companies to do the job right.

Beaudet: What is the message to the insurance companies?

Salluzzo: Wake up. You are playing with lives and not dollars.

The Automobile Insurers Bureau of Massachusetts did not want to comment on our investigation. And neither did the Massachusetts Glass Dealers Association.

If you are wondering what you can do to make sure your windshield is replaced properly, there are some steps you can take.

Our expert says if you need to get your windshield replaced in the winter, you should have it done indoors. Insist that a strong adhesive be used to bond the glass.

Make sure the installer removes the cowl before replacing the windshield.

Do not drive your car until the adhesive has fully dried. Check with the manufacturer of the adhesive to find out when your vehicle will be safe to drive.

And do not let your insurance company steer you in the wrong direction. It may recommend a place that cuts corners and that could cost you your life.