



Highlights: Appliance Repair Services

A broken home appliance is a major inconvenience, especially when the dirty dishes are piling up or the groceries you just bought are at risk for spoiling. You want a service that will fix the appliance in short order, and at a fair price. **Bay Area Consumers' CHECKBOOK**, (available at www.checkbook.org), can help, with sound advice and ratings of local appliance repair services for quality and price. Highlights from CHECKBOOK's appliance repair report include:

- Should you repair or replace an appliance? If you are happy with the appliance (look, size, features, energy use) and it seems to be in good condition, it is probably worth fixing—it is likely to provide many years of service beyond the often misleading "average lifespan" cited for appliances.
- Well-built appliances with few fancy controls might last much longer than their less durable, more high-tech counterparts, and small households that use appliances lightly can also expect longer lifespans.
- Just because one element of an appliance breaks doesn't mean others will soon fail. The appliance might last years without any further problems. Many major appliances labor on for decades.
- Good reasons for replacing appliances include wanting new features and looks, noticeable rust or other visible flaws on existing appliances, and desire for better energy efficiency.
- Keep in mind that some appliances, like clothes dryers, aren't much more efficient today than they were years ago, and even clothes washers and dishwashers, which have made environmental strides, won't make a big difference in energy use if you only do a handful of loads a week.
- Some appliance repair services were rated "superior" for "overall quality" by at least 90 percent of their surveyed customers, but others received "superior" ratings from fewer than 40 percent.
- You don't have to pay more to get good service. CHECKBOOK found, on average, lower-priced companies actually rated higher on service quality than their higher-priced competitors.
- Shop around for appliance repair service; there are big differences in price for the same work. For example, CHECKBOOK's undercover price shoppers found that the cost to replace the upper and lower door gaskets on a Whirlpool refrigerator ranged from \$289 to \$577 among local companies. To replace the motor and pump on a GE Profile dishwasher, prices ranged from \$266 to \$585.
- If an appliance is under warranty, use a service authorized to do in-warranty repairs for your make of appliance. Once the warranty is up, consider shops that don't perform warranty repairs. Independent repair services tend to rate better than factory repair services.
- The most common complaint with appliance repair is failure to get the item fixed correctly—sometimes after multiple attempts. Other common problems are missed appointments and delays in getting parts.
- Even if you've had a poor track record with unreliable appliances, don't buy an extended warranty. CHECKBOOK considers these warranties incredibly bad deals for most consumers.

CHECKBOOK offers the following tips to help consumers get good service from any appliance repair service:

- Describe your appliance's symptoms and its manufacturer and model number when you call for service.
- Ask by phone how much the company charges for service calls and confirm this upon the serviceperson's arrival--the minimum charge, how much time is included in the minimum, what time units are used in figuring charges (per half hour? per 15 minutes?), etc.
- After the diagnosis is complete, ask for a written estimate before proceeding with repairs. Also ask for a dated invoice before paying. It should itemize charges for labor and parts, and include any warranty.

The media may cite selected examples of top-rated appliance repair services, as shown in Bay Area Consumers' CHECKBOOK, and CHECKBOOK's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.