



Highlights: Appliance Repair

When your major home appliances go offline, it can feel like a far-from-minor problem. **Chicago Consumers' Checkbook** (Checkbook.org) can help, with sound advice and ratings of local appliance repair services for quality and price. Highlights from Checkbook's report include:

Getting great service and fair prices

- Checkbook's ratings of appliance repair services reveal substantial quality differences. Several appliance repair services were rated "superior" for "overall quality" by at least 90 percent of their surveyed customers. Others received such favorable ratings from fewer than half of their surveyed customers.
- Among local repair companies, Checkbook found prices to replace the control board for a Maytag clothes dryer ranged from \$309 to \$585 at different shops in the area, and prices to replace the inner glass on the door for a Whirlpool oven ranged from \$167 to \$420.
- Fortunately, some of the area's low-priced companies also got good reviews from customers. In fact, lower-priced companies on average rate higher on service quality than their higher-priced competitors.
- If your appliance is covered by a manufacturer's warranty, use a shop authorized to perform in-warranty repairs so you don't have to pay for the work. But after the warranty expires, use a top-rated shop. Checkbook has found that, on average, independent shops rate better than factory repair shops.

Dealing with a repair service

- When you call, ask how the company calculates charges—especially what its minimum charge covers.
- During the call, describe your appliance's problem in detail. This will help the company send the right technician, put necessary parts on the truck, and schedule enough time for the job.
- Before the technician arrives, clear everything away from the appliance so that work can start at once.
- Describe the appliance's problem to the technician just as you did over the phone.
- After the diagnosis, request a final price for the repair. If the estimate seems high, ask how long the estimate is good for and whether a second visit will incur an additional travel charge. Then call a few other repair services for price quotes, to make sure you don't overpay.
- Ask about any warranties on parts and labor.
- If you go ahead with the repair, ask to keep, or at least see, any replaced parts.
- Ask the technician what he or she will be doing. Observe the process, but don't distract him or her.
- Before paying obtain a detailed invoice, and if you can, pay by credit card. If there is a problem, you can dispute the transaction with the card issuer.

Repair or replace?

- If you are happy with the appliance and it seems to be in good condition, it is probably worth fixing.
- 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 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.
- Some appliances aren't much more efficient today than they were years ago, and some that are (like dishwashers and clothes washers) won't save much energy if you only do a handful of loads a week.
- Consider whether you can fix it yourself. While many people are uncomfortable making repairs to electronic devices, most appliance repairs are quite straightforward. Checkbook offers DIY advice.

Checkbook's editors are available for interviews. Please contact Jamie Lettis at 202-454-3006 or jlettis@checkbook.org to schedule.