



## PERSPECTIVE The Hills of Connecticut are Slippery; and So is Steering

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**by Bill Denya**

Connecticut is hilly. In fact, the western part of the state, known officially as the Western New England Upland, is characterized by steep hills and ridges. There are abrupt inclines in the central region, sharp peaks in Litchfield County, and a long drop towards the Coastal Lowlands that run along the southern shore of the state near Long Island Sound. You would be hard-pressed to drive very long without encountering significant ups and downs.

With spring rainfall, especially over last year's dead leaves, hills can become dangerous; they often mean skidding, sliding, slipping, and occasionally crashing. That in turn leads to trips to the auto body shop to bring our vehicles back to pristine, road-worthy condition. Or not.

Through no fault of our own, many consumers unwittingly are directed, or steered, to specific auto body repair shops by the appraiser who inspects the damage to our vehicle, or by our automotive insurance policy holder. The rationale behind this "steering" is that we consumers are sent to places where the repairs will cost less and everyone wins.

The auto body shop will get our business, the insurance company won't have to pay out as much in damages and we policy holders may not see our rates go up as much. Great idea.

Except that far too often the reason the repairs cost less is because substandard parts are used, sometimes in conjunction with substandard workmanship. This further endangers us motorists who certainly don't want to get back out on the road only to find ourselves in another collision, this one caused by our own recently repaired vehicle.

The Connecticut Auto Body Association has successfully fought against insurance company steering for many years, and in 2010 was instrumental in convincing the state legislature to outlaw steering in Connecticut.

Nonetheless, the practice still exists in Connecticut and nationwide, and it is causing considerable concern. State Attorneys General and auto body shop owners in at least 36 states currently are pushing for anti-steering legislation nationwide. It is obvious that the current laws need stricter enforcement and new laws need to be passed.

Among those pushing for nationwide anti-steering legislation is U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal who was a staunch proponent of Connecticut's earlier legislation. Blumenthal is so concerned about the possibility of injuries to motorists due to substandard replacement parts that he has asked the U.S. Justice Department to launch an investigation into the practice.

Blumenthal recently said that "steering often involves the use of parts that may be salvaged or inferior or even counterfeit." He added that the possibility of accident and injuries caused by such parts are "a real urgent and imminent safety concern for the consumer who may have no idea what the origin of the parts are, who made them, or even whether they're installed properly."

It is one thing to have an accident because the hills of our Connecticut can send us "slip-sliding away" in a rainstorm. It is quite another matter to cause a collision due to inferior parts and workmanship on a vehicle that we just paid to have repaired, and that we trusted to be roadworthy.

There are enough dangers on the roads, regardless of the season or weather, without adding to them by using poor quality parts.

*Bill Denya is a board member and former president of the [Auto Body Association of Connecticut](#), a statewide consumer advocacy group. He is the owner of Denya's Auto Body in Meriden, and can be reached at (203) 237-6068.*

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