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## Cycle and recycle

**N**ot all vehicles involved in accidents are old; sometimes they are almost brand-new. Despite their potential future lifetime, repairing them might cost more than their residual value. Is it worthwhile to invest £20,000 in the repair of a vehicle worth £15,000, or scrap it as an insurance write-off? In my job as head of fleet of an emergency services operation, I am faced with this sort of decision every day.

The answer depends partly on the financial and operational impact. If a specialist vehicle is written off, you can't just go out and buy a new one next day; the process can take nine months or longer, during which time a department is without a resource. As a general rule, the more specialised the vehicle, the stronger is the case for repair.

Following an accident investigation, the vehicle will eventually be cleared for decommissioning and moved on to a vehicle dismantling facility. Contrary to popular belief, vehicle dismantlers no longer deal with just rusty wrecks; the parts that they salvage have a value, not only to operators but also to the environment, as reusing parts saves the energy required to make new ones (see also pp27-9).

Sometimes we re-use parts from vehicles we originally sent to the dismantlers. If I needed replacement doors for a vehicle that was side impacted, there is the possibility of obtaining them if there's still a donor vehicle available. In that case, not only is there a financial and labour time saving but as they are already adapted for our operational duty, the vehicle downtime is significantly reduced.

I would be wary about using recycled parts for anything that may affect the vehicle safety and handling characteristics. Certain vehicle components have a finite life and I don't want to build a problem into a vehicle.

But whenever I need a certain vehicle components, I would always consider the merits of using recycled parts.



Michael Sweetmore  
**President, Society of Operations Engineers**

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