

AUTOMOTIVE

Tesla sees first autopilot fatality after more than 130M miles of safe driving

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Aerial view of Tesla's Model S

By STAFF REPORTS

U.S. electric automaker Tesla Motors has issued a statement following a fatal crash in which the driver had activated autopilot.

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The crash, which saw a Tesla Model S collide with the back end of a large truck in Florida, is now the subject of an investigation by U.S. authorities. The fatality is being called the first to occur on the road where self-driving technology was in use, thus raising skepticism that the general driving public is prepared to embrace autonomous automobiles fully.

Driving risks

In Tesla's statement, the automaker explained that the death of Joshua Brown, age 40, is the first known fatality in more than 130 million miles of autonomous driving.

From what is known about the circumstances of the crash, Tesla noted that the Model S driven by Mr. Brown was on a divided highway with the autopilot setting on. A tractor trailer drove across the highway perpendicular to Mr. Brown, and due to the brightness of the white side of the truck and the bright blue sky, neither the autopilot sensors nor the driver were able to apply the brake in time.

Due to the positioning and height of the tractor trailer, Mr. Brown's Model S passed under the truck with the windshield hitting the edge. Tesla feels that if the impact had occurred to the front or rear of the tractor trailer, even at a high rate of speed, the vehicle's crash safety system would have prevented serious injury.



Tesla Model S

"It is important to note that Tesla disables autopilot by default and requires explicit acknowledgement that the system is new technology and still in public beta phase before it can be enabled," Tesla said in a statement.

"When drivers activate autopilot, the acknowledgement box explains, among other things, that autopilot is an assist feature that requires you to keep your hands on the steering wheel at all times,' and that you need to maintain control and responsibility for your vehicle,' while using it," the brand continued.

While Tesla did express its sympathy and sadness over the situation, the automaker stressed that "Autopilot is getting better all the time, but it is not perfect and still requires the driver to remain alert."

The news of the fatal crash comes as Tesla is under fire for a term in a goodwill agreement related to a potentially faulty suspension.

Consumer-rights law firm Hagens Berman is investigating the agreement, which allegedly restricts the rights of owners in the event of defects or other wrongdoings on the part of Tesla. Mandatory silences are becoming a more common tactic among businesses and have a history in the automotive sector, but the allegations contradict Tesla's transparent and responsible image ([see story](#)).

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