

Top US auto regulator launches probe into Tesla's Autopilot

Article

The news: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has **officially launched a formal safety probe** into Tesla's **Autopilot** driver assistance feature following a rise in reports of crashes with emergency response vehicles, **per** The Associated Press.

- The NHTSA says it identified **11 crashes** since 2018 where Teslas which were using the Autopilot function or a similar Traffic-Aware Cruise Control feature struck first responder

vehicles

- The investigation includes Tesla Y, X, S, and 3 models with Autopilot capabilities manufactured between 2014 and 2021—about **765,000 vehicles in total**.
- In a statement, the NHTSA said the majority of the crashes occurred at **night**, with crash scenes littered by a cacophony of emergency lights, traffic cones, and other road hazard warnings.
- Four incidents occurred in 2021 alone, and those crashes **reportedly left 17 injured and one dead**.

How we got here: Regulatory interest in Autopilot and other driver assistance features has heated up as more drivers adopt the technology.

- Earlier this year, the NHTSA **sent** teams to investigate **31 crashes** involving semi autonomous vehicles going back to June 2016. **25 of those crashes** involved Tesla's Autopilot.

More on this: Tesla has drawn particular scrutiny after the company announced it would transition Autopilot away from lidar and radar, and instead use only computer vision.

- Critics warn that Tesla's abandonment of radar and lidar could raise safety concerns, **especially in stormy weather or during night driving**, because radar and lidar are currently better-equipped to detect road obstacles during in-climate weather than camera capture video.
- Following the decision, both Consumer Reports and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety **removed** Tesla models from their top safety picks.

What's next? Increased regulatory scrutiny or a potential recall could shatter already shaky consumer trust in AVs, and potentially force Tesla to scale back Autopilot's timeline for fully transitioning to computer vision.

Increased regulatory setbacks could magnify consumer's safety concerns, ultimately delaying AV adoption. For context, nearly half (**48%**) of US respondents in a 2020 Deloitte survey **said** they thought AVs would not be safe, a figure slightly higher than from two years prior (**47%**).

Internet Users in Select Countries Who Agree that Autonomous Vehicles Will Not Be Safe, Oct 2019

% of respondents

	2018	2019	2020
India	47%	48%	58%
US	47%	50%	48%
Japan	57%	50%	47%
South Korea	54%	49%	46%
Germany	45%	47%	45%
China	26%	25%	35%

Note: ages 18+; "agree" or "strongly agree"

Source: Deloitte, "2020 Global Automotive Consumer Study," Jan 6, 2020

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