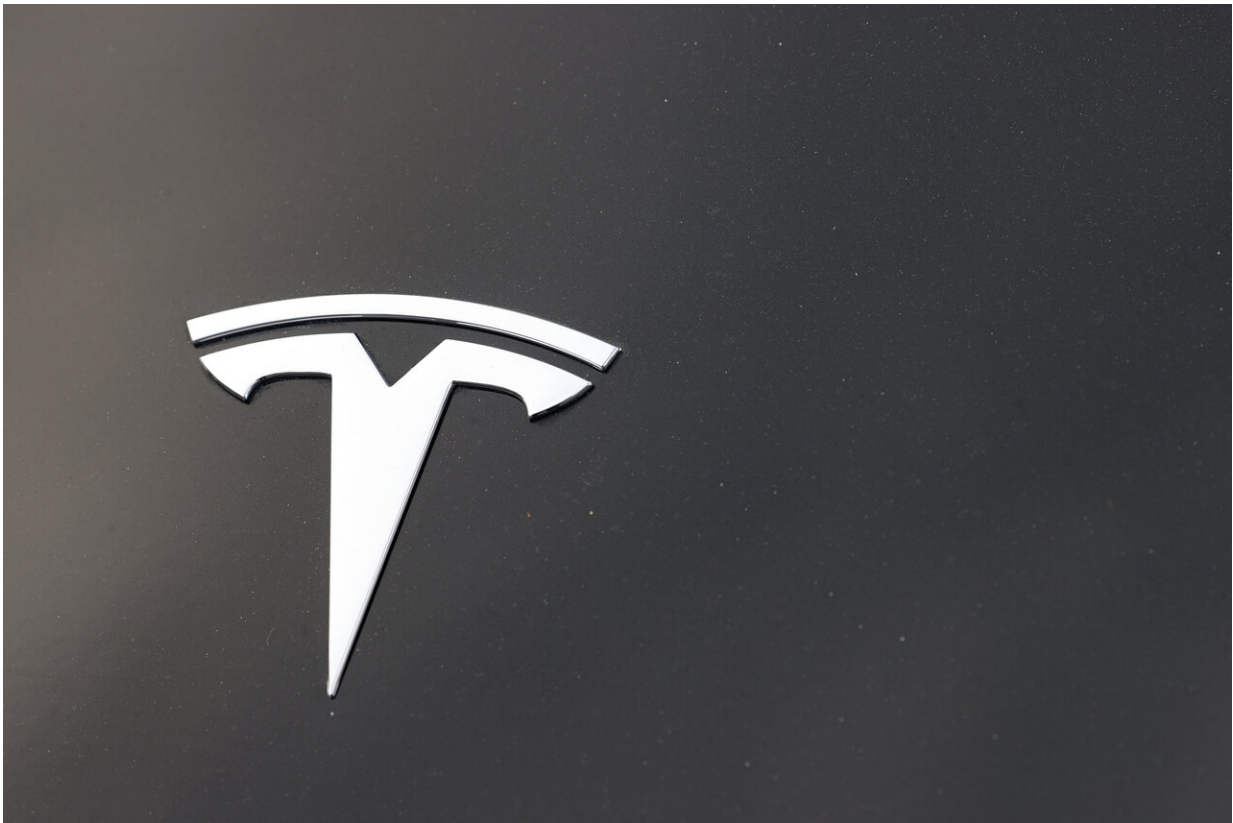


US sends investigators to probe another Michigan Tesla crash

March 18 2021



The company logo is seen on the hood of an unsold Tesla at a dealership late Sunday, Aug. 9, 2020, in Littleton, Colo. On Monday, March 15, 2021, the U.S. government's highway safety agency said it is sending a team to Detroit to investigate a crash involving a Tesla that drove beneath a semitrailer. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

For the second time this week, the U.S. government's road safety agency is sending a team to investigate a Tesla crash in Michigan.

This time, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is sending a special [crash](#) investigation team because a Tesla using the company's Autopilot partially automated driving system crashed into a State Police cruiser with flashing lights along a freeway.

It's another sign that the safety agency under President Joe Biden may be taking a stronger look at regulating driver-assist systems such as Autopilot, as well as self-driving automobiles. Previously, it had taken a hands-off approach to the new technologies, favoring voluntary safety compliance so it wouldn't interfere with the promising safety systems.

In the freeway crash, the police car was parked on Interstate 96 in Eaton County near the state capital of Lansing while a trooper investigated a car-deer crash early Wednesday, WLNS-TV reported. Neither the trooper nor the 22-year-old Tesla driver were injured in the 1:10 a.m. crash, police said. The Tesla's driver was issued citations for failure to move over and driving with a license suspended.

In a statement, NHTSA said it would send the team to investigate "consistent with NHTSA's vigilant oversight and robust authority over the safety of all motor vehicles and equipment, including automated technologies."

An email message seeking comment Wednesday night from Tesla was not immediately returned. Tesla has disbanded its press office and has not returned messages for months.

Earlier this week NHTSA sent a special crash investigation team [to Detroit for a crash](#) that involved a Tesla that drove beneath a semitrailer. Two people in the Tesla were hurt in the crash last Thursday on the city's

southwest side. WJBK-TV quoted a Detroit police deputy chief as saying all indications are that the car was not in Autopilot mode.

The circumstances of the Detroit crash were similar to two others in Florida in which Teslas drove beneath tractor-trailers, causing two deaths. In both crashes, in 2016 and 2019, the cars were being driven while using Tesla's Autopilot system, which can steer a car to keep it in a lane and stop it from hitting vehicles in front of it.

NHTSA's moves to send teams to both crashes indicates that it may be taking a different stance on automated driving systems, said Sam Abuelsamid, principal analyst for Guidehouse Insights. "It seems that under the new administration, NHTSA has finally started to take a serious look at this," he said.

NHTSA has previously investigated more than a dozen Tesla crashes, but hasn't made public any action. In January, before Biden took office, it threatened a public hearing and possible legal action to get the Palo Alto, California-based company to recall vehicles for a touch screen problem.

Tesla has said previously that its Autopilot and its "full self-driving" software are driver-assistance systems and that the driver must be ready to intervene at all times.

Tesla has been criticized by the National Transportation Safety Board for failing to adequately monitor drivers to make sure they are paying attention. The NTSB, which investigates crashes and makes recommendations, also criticized Tesla for allowing the system to work on roads that it can't handle.

Abuelsamid said a February letter to NHTSA from NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt urging regulation of the new systems may have prodded NHTSA into taking more action. "Hopefully we will finally see NHTSA

establish standards" for driver assist systems, he said.

Jason Levine, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety, said it's about time NHTSA starts to get serious about the risks posed to all motorists by companies such as Tesla, "who are intentionally misleading the public regarding the capabilities and shortcomings of their technology."

Under President Donald Trump, NHTSA either could not or would not take action, Levine said. "We can only hope the era of vehicle [safety](#) being an afterthought is over."

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