

Tesla to halt games on infotainment screens in moving cars

December 23 2021, by Tom Krisher



Vince Patton, a new Tesla owner, demonstrates on Dec. 8, 2021, on a closed course in Portland, Ore., how he can play video games on the vehicle's console while driving. Under pressure from U.S. auto safety regulators, Tesla has agreed to stop allowing video games to be played on center touch screens while its vehicles are moving. Credit: AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus, File

Under pressure from U.S. auto safety regulators, Tesla has agreed to stop allowing video games to be played on center touch screens while its

vehicles are moving.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says the company will send out a [software update](#) over the Internet so the function called "Passenger Play" will be locked and won't work while vehicles are in motion.

The move comes one day after the agency announced it would open a formal investigation into distracted driving concerns about Tesla's video games, some of which could be played while cars are being driven.

An agency spokeswoman says in a statement Thursday that the change came after regulators discussed concerns about the system with Tesla. The first update went out Wednesday as part of Tesla's holiday software release, and the rest of the vehicles should get it today.

The statement says NHTSA regularly talks about infotainment screens with all automakers. A message was left Thursday seeking comment from Tesla, which has disbanded its media relations department.

The agency says its investigation of Tesla's feature will continue even with the update. It was not clear whether NHTSA would require Tesla to do a formal recall with the update. In the past the agency has asked Tesla why it should not be required to do recalls with safety-related software updates.

"The Vehicle Safety Act prohibits manufacturers from selling vehicles with defects posing unreasonable risks to safety, including technologies that distract [drivers](#) from driving safely," NHTSA's statement said. The agency said it assesses how manufacturers identify and guard against distraction hazards due to misuse or intended use of screens and other convenience technology.

The agency announced Wednesday that it would formally investigate Tesla's screens after an owner from the Portland, Oregon, area filed a complaint when he discovered that a driver could play games while the cars are moving.

The agency said that the "Passenger Play" feature could distract the driver and increase the risk of a crash.

The probe covers about 580,000 Tesla Models S, X, Y and 3 from the 2017 through 2022 model years.

In documents detailing the investigation, NHTSA said "Passenger Play" has been available since December 2020. Before that, enabling gameplay was only possible when its vehicles were in park.

The NHTSA documents do not list any crashes or injuries caused by the problem.

Tesla owner Vince Patton, 59, filed the complaint last month after discovering the gaming feature could be played by drivers. Patton, who loves his car and says he has nothing against Tesla, worries that drivers will play games and become dangerously distracted. "Somebody's going to get killed," he said. "It's absolutely insane."

NHTSA already is investigating why Tesla's "Autopilot" partially automated driving system keeps crashing into stopped emergency vehicles. It's also looking into the performance of Tesla's "Full Self-Driving" software after getting a complaint that it nearly caused a crash.

Tesla says neither system can drive vehicles and that drivers must pay attention and be ready to intervene at all times.

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