

Feds probe NY Tesla crash that killed man changing flat tire

3 September 2021, by Tom Krisher



This Feb. 9, 2019, file photo shows a sign bearing the company logo outside a Tesla store in Cherry Creek Mall in Denver. The U.S. government's road safety agency has added another fatality, Friday, Sept. 3, 2021, involving a Tesla to the list of crashes it is probing due to the use of partially automated driving systems. Credit: AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File

The U.S. government's road safety agency has added another fatality involving a Tesla to the list of crashes it is probing due to the use of partially automated driving systems.

A special crash investigation team was dispatched to a July 26 crash on the Long Island Expressway in New York in which a man was killed by a Tesla Model Y SUV, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said on Friday.

The death brings to 10 the number of fatal crashes to which the agency has sent a team, nine of which involved Teslas. A total of 12 people were killed. The only fatal crash in which a Tesla wasn't involved was in March of 2018, when an autonomous Uber test vehicle ran down a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona.

The New York crash is on an updated list of those under investigation by NHTSA that was released on Friday.

The New York Police Department said that early on July 26, a 52-year-old man was hit by a Tesla and killed while changing a flat tire on his vehicle, which was parked on the left shoulder of the Long Island Expressway in Queens. The Tesla driver remained at the scene, and the department identified the victim as Jean Louis of Cambria Heights, New York. On Friday, police said they're conferring with NHTSA in the continuing investigation, and no arrest has been made.

The additional fatality was revealed about three weeks after NHTSA opened a formal investigation into Tesla's partially automated driving systems and how they have crashed into parked emergency vehicles. The probe comes as the agency has become more aggressive in looking at automated driving systems since President Joe Biden took office. For years NHTSA has been reluctant to regulate the systems, which have tremendous potential to save lives.

A message was left Friday seeking comment from Tesla, which is based in Palo Alto, California. In the past the company has said Autopilot is a driver-assist system and that drivers must be ready to intervene at all times. Tesla has been criticized by the National Transportation Safety Board and others who say it needs a stronger system to watch drivers to make sure they are paying attention.

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