Tesla doesn’t want anyone to see its response to the Autopilot investigation

Tesla wants to keep secret its response to the federal investigation into its Autopilot driver assist system. In a memo submitted to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) last week, regulators noted that Tesla has requested “confidential business information (CBI) treatment for the entirety of the information request submission.”

If Tesla’s request is granted, it would effectively bar the public from seeing the company’s response to a host of information that NHTSA has requested regarding its probe into Autopilot and possible defects.

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The agency wants to know why Tesla didn’t issue a recall for Autopilot after it became obvious the driver assistance system had a problem “seeing” parked emergency vehicles. NHTSA is also asking Tesla for more information about the growing public beta test of its incomplete Full Self-Driving software, the recently launched “Safety Score” evaluation process for entering the program, and the nondisclosure agreements Tesla was making participants sign up until this week.

The request for confidentiality was made amid a period of intense scrutiny into Tesla and its willingness to rollout unfinished software updates to its customers. There have been at least a dozen incidents in which Teslas with Autopilot activated have crashed into parked emergency vehicles.

Tesla shipped a software update to its cars meant to fix the issue with its driver assistance system in September. But NHTSA wants to know why Tesla didn’t go through the formal recall process with this update, potentially setting up a protracted fight over whether over-the-air updates that can materially change how cars operate should be subjected to the government’s stringent automotive safety rules.

Tesla started rolling out a new software update over the weekend, but reversed it on Sunday after the company’s CEO Elon Musk tweeted that they were “seeing some issues” with it. Some Tesla owners reported problems such as phantom forward collision warnings, disappearing Autosteer option, traffic-aware cruise control problems, and occasional AutoPilot panic.

The news of Tesla’s request for confidentiality also comes as scores of the company’s fans have posted disparaging comments about a new hire at NHTSA, robotics expert Missy Cummings, whom they view as being hostile to the company. Cummings reportedly received death threats from some Tesla fans, causing her to delete her Twitter account.

https://www.theverge.com/2021/10/25/22744629/tesla-autopilot-secret-response-nhtsa-investigation