Tesla says Autopilot was engaged during fatal Model X crash

Tesla says Autopilot was engaged at the time of a deadly Model X crash that occurred March 23rd in Mountain View, California. The company posted a statement online late Friday, after local news reported that the victim had made several complaints to Tesla about the vehicle's Autopilot technology prior to the crash in which he died.

After recovering the logs from the crash site, Tesla acknowledged that Autopilot was on, with the adaptive cruise control follow distance set to a minimum. The company also said that the driver, identified as Apple engineer Wei "Walter" Huang, had his hands off the steering wheel and was not responding to warnings to re-take control.

> *The driver had received several visual and one audible hands-on warning earlier in the drive and the driver's hands were not detected on the wheel for six seconds prior to the collision. The driver had about five seconds and 150 meters of unobstructed view of the concrete divider with the crushed crash attenuator, but the vehicle logs show that no action was taken.*

The driver of the car, Huang, was headed southbound on California's Route 101 when his Model X crashed headfirst into the safety barrier section of a divider that separates the carpool lane from the off-ramp to the left. The front end of his SUV was ripped apart, the vehicle caught fire, and two other cars crashed into the rear end. Huang was removed from

the vehicle by rescuers and brought to Stanford Hospital, where he died from injuries sustained in the crash, according to *Mercury News*. The National Traffic Safety Board (NTSB) has launched an investigation into the incident.

Tesla said the reason the crash was so severe was because the attenuator had been crushed in a prior accident without being replaced. “We have never seen this level of damage to a Model X in any other crash,” the company said, echoing a comment it made earlier in the week.

In its statement, Tesla admits that Autopilot is an imperfect system, but argues its far better than the alternative.

> *Tesla Autopilot does not prevent all accidents – such a standard would be impossible – but it makes them much less likely to occur. It unequivocally makes the world safer for the vehicle occupants, pedestrians and cyclists.*
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> *No one knows about the accidents that didn’t happen, only the ones that did. The consequences of the public not using Autopilot, because of an inaccurate belief that it is less safe, would be extremely severe. There are about 1.25 million automotive deaths worldwide. If the current safety level of a Tesla vehicle were to be applied, it would mean about 900,000 lives saved per year. We expect the safety level of autonomous cars to be 10 times safer than non-autonomous cars.*

Huang’s death occurred less than a week after a self-driving Uber vehicle killed a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona, sparking a national debate about the safety of autonomous cars. Tesla has faced questions about Autopilot before, when a Florida driver died from a collision with a tractor-trailer in 2016. The NTSB found that Autopilot operated mostly as intended, but it “gave far more leeway to the driver to divert his attention to something other than driving,” which contributed to the crash. The NTSB has also recently looked into a January 2018 accident

where the driver of a Model S claims to have been using Autopilot when the car crashed into a fire truck.

https://www.theverge.com/2018/3/30/17182824/tesla-model-x-crash-autopilot-statement