Uber backup driver charged in fatal 2018 self-driving car crash

The backup safety driver who was behind the wheel when one of Uber's self-driving cars struck and killed a pedestrian in 2018 has been charged with negligent homicide, the *New York Times* reports. Rafaela Vasquez, who investigators say was watching an episode of *The Voice* at the time of the crash, has pleaded not guilty.

The crash, which happened on March 18th, 2018 and resulted in the death of Elaine Herzberg, is believed to be the first fatal collision involving a self-driving car. Investigators have said the car saw Herzberg, but did not automatically stop, and that Vasquez did not brake until it was too late. The case has raised important questions about how to safely test the new technology, and who should be held responsible when something goes wrong.

Uber temporarily halted its self-driving tests after the collision

In March 2019, an Arizona prosecutor's office ruled that Uber would not face criminal charges over the crash. However, a review by the National Transportation Safety Board later that year highlighted a number of safety issues at the company. It said that it had "inadequate safety risk assessment procedures," "ineffective" monitoring of backup drivers, and a failure to address the "automation complacency" of its safety drivers, who needed to be able to step in at any moment to address problems.

The same review also called Arizona's policies to regulate

self-driving vehicles on its public roads “insufficient,” and suggested that Herzberg may have crossed the street outside of the crosswalk.

Uber temporarily halted its self-driving tests immediately following the crash, and when they resumed later that year in Pittsburgh they did so with much more stringent safety policies including having two safety drivers in each vehicle. Uber has subsequently expanded these new tests to more cities, including Dallas and San Francisco.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/9/16/21439354/uber-backup-driver-charged-autonomous-self-driving-car-crash-negligent-homicide