



Tesla Sued by 5 Police Officers Badly Injured by Vehicle Operating in Autopilot

Description

USA: Tesla on Autopilot slammed into police cars despite flashing lights, lawsuit says

Officers say Tesla failed to detect four vehicles, six people, and a police dog.

Tesla has been sued by five Texas police officers who were injured when a Tesla Model X in Autopilot mode crashed into police vehicles that were stopped and had their flashing lights turned on. The officers also sued the owner of a restaurant accused of overserving alcohol to the X's driver.

"On February 27, 2021, a Tesla Model X engaged in Autopilot and equipped with Tesla's proprietary system of safety features, crashed into several police officers who were engaged in a traffic stop in a blocked-off lane of traffic on the Eastex Freeway in Texas. All were badly injured," the lawsuit said. The officers include four Montgomery County constables and a Splendora police officer, according to a Houston Public Media [article](#).

The lawsuit accuses Tesla of gross negligence for "failing to safely and properly design, market, and manufacture the Autopilot system" and, among other things, "failing to warn the public of the Autopilot system's inability to detect emergency cars with flashing lights." The plaintiffs are seeking "damages for the severe injuries and permanent disabilities they suffered as a result of the crash," and they want to "force Tesla to publicly acknowledge and immediately correct the known defects inherent in its Autopilot and collision avoidance systems, particularly as those impact the ongoing safety of our nation's first responders," the lawsuit said.

The [complaint](#), which is available in a [KPRC Click2Houston news article](#), was filed Sunday in Harris County District Court. The plaintiffs who sued Tesla are Dalton Fields, Rai Duenas, Kenneth Barnett, Chris Taylor, and Daniel Santiago.

NHTSA investigates crashes into emergency vehicles

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is [investigating Tesla](#) over crashes into

emergency vehicles, [noting that](#) in the US there have been “twelve incidents where a Tesla vehicle operating in either Autopilot or Traffic Aware Cruise Control struck first responder vehicles/scenes, leading to injuries and vehicle damage.” The 12 crashes, including the one involving Texas officers, all happened between January 2018 and August 2021.

The officers’ lawsuit said, “there have been numerous accidents and reports involving Tesla’s Autopilot system and emergency vehicles with flashing lights since its release” and that “Tesla has carelessly failed to recall, repair, remedy and/or otherwise notify the public of the hazards associated with the Autopilot system’ failure to detect cars with flashing lights and effectively engage the Autopilot system to avoid or ameliorate the risks of collision.”

Tesla and its CEO Elon Musk have “repeatedly exaggerated the actual capabilities of Autopilot, resulting in the public, including first responders, and Tesla drivers being put at a significant risk of serious injury or death,” the lawsuit claims.

Tesla hit two police cars at 70 mph

The Texas crash occurred when officers had pulled over and were searching a different vehicle for drugs. “[A] 2019 Model X Tesla, going approximately 70 mph, plowed into the scene of the police stop,” the lawsuit said. “The Tesla slammed into the two police Tahoes with flashing lights that were blocking the scene, pushing the Tahoes into the officers and the civilian who was detained. Plaintiffs were seriously injured and could have been killed.”

The crash happened around 1:15 am, according to an [ABC 13 news story](#) published on the day of the accident. The Tesla driver was not injured and was arrested on a charge of driving while intoxicated, the article said.

The officers’ injuries weren’t initially believed to be serious, “ranging from scrapes to back injuries” and “a possible broken arm,” the article said. The man whose car was being searched “was standing on the shoulder of the road when the crash happened and was seriously injured” and “was transported to a hospital in critical condition.”

The other defendant is Pappasito’s Cantina, a restaurant where “the driver consumed alcohol to the point where he was obviously intoxicated, and he presented a clear danger to himself and others,” the lawsuit said. Pappas Restaurants, the Houston-based chain that owns the restaurant, told KPRC that it “will be conducting an investigation into [the lawsuit’s] allegations.”

Tesla “completely unable” to detect vehicles

While the driver’s intoxication played a role in the crash, the lawsuit said that Tesla’s safety system was “completely unable” to detect the presence of police vehicles:

Even though Autopilot was enabled at the time and the police cars had flashing lights, the Tesla failed to engage the Autopilot safety features to avoid the accident. The vehicle did not apply its “Automatic Emergency Braking” to slow down to avoid or mitigate the accident. The Tesla was completely unable to detect the existence of at least four vehicles, six people, and a German Shepherd fully stopped in the lane of traffic. The Tahoes were declared a total loss. The police officers and the civilian were taken to the hospital, and Canine Officer Kodiak had to visit the vet.”

We contacted Tesla about the lawsuit and will update this article if we get a response.

By B.N. Frank

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