


Tesla workers say factory has had multiple fires and that Elon Musk is Lying to the public



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Employees say Tesla has experienced at least four fires in its pair years, and that sprinklers and air filtration systems are clogged

- Fires in the paint shop contributed to sluggish Model 3 production, and fumes there are leaving them concerned about their health

 An employee works on a Tesla Motors Model S sedan as it makes its way along an assembly line at company's assembly plant in Fremont, California.

Noah Berger | Bloomberg | Getty Images

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Tesla has had at least four fires in the paint shop at its Fremont, California, plant since 2014, according to five people familiar with operations at that plant. One [previously reported](#) fire, in April, was serious enough to stop multiple shifts that week, these people said. Another fire took place in June, which caused at least a day of suspended vehicle production. Both fires damaged equipment.

These people blamed the fires in part on improper cleaning, maintenance and training for new employees in the face of high pressure to meet production goals. Current employees said they were concerned about their health because of the fumes from the fires.

poor air quality. All the people agreed that the April fire contributed to the slow Model 3 production.

A Tesla spokesperson denied that the April fire was "significant" to Model 3 production, and said:

"In recent months, we have further enhanced the safety and efficiency of our paint shop, including significant upgrades to equipment, as well as increased maintenance effort involving cleaning and calibration. In order to protect the health of our employees, we also conduct regular air monitoring and ventilation and personal protective equipment for everyone working in the paint shop."

Tesla's future as a mass-market carmaker hinges on efficient, high-volume production of the Model 3, the company's lowest-priced offering so far. When [Tesla](#) announced in 2016, CEO [Elon Musk](#) said it would be able to produce 100,000 to 200,000 Model 3s by the end of 2017 with a base price of \$35,000.

Instead, Tesla produced just 2,685 Model 3s in total for all of 2017. Tesla also missed its goal of producing 2,500 Model 3s per week by the end of the year. The company has sold only premium versions of the Model 3, which start at \$78,000.

Paint shop issues are still hampering Tesla's progress with Model 3 production. Current employees and other people familiar with Tesla's paint shop operations have declined to speak on the matter for anonymity because they have not been authorized to speak to the press.

April fire

 [The first deliveries of the Tesla Model 3 on July 29, 2017.](#)

Alexis Georgeson | Harvest Films

The first deliveries of the Tesla Model 3 on July 29, 2017.

When a paint shop fire [halted vehicle production](#) around 7 a.m. on Monday, a Tesla spokesperson said the fire was "small" and extinguished by firefighters in a matter of seconds.

But employees told CNBC the fire was significant enough to stop production on that day. The shop was also shut down for at least one more day. Tesla forced Tesla to decommission two burnt sprayer robots that they valued at over \$1 million.

The fire happened just after the company's head of vehicle engineering, [Elon Musk](#), is [now on leave](#), sent out an e-mail encouraging employees to "persevere in that spirit, and under management's direction, paint shop crews will get back to work."

The week of the fire, according to two employees and two other people familiar with the Fremont factory, Musk showed up to assess damage to the paint shop, an entire zone dedicated to painting Model 3s.

Rather than suspending operations immediately, Musk and other executives pushed forward with what they could and push through.

Some Model 3 parts, including B-pillars and chassis components, that were in the paint shop at the time, were moved into a containment area, and then sent back into production, rather than being scrapped or further tested, a Tesla spokesperson said.

Tesla emphasized that no damaged parts were used in new vehicles.

Engineers scrambled to repurpose equipment in the paint shop that could be used to put primer on both the interior and exterior surfaces. Before the fire, separate robots handled interior and exterior priming.

Tesla handled the April 3 fire with its own internal brigade. It did not call the Fremont Fire Department, a spokesperson for the department confirmed.

However, a citizen did call after seeing reports about the fire on social media, a fire department spokesperson said. Tesla security greeted a fire department investigator who went to investigate and said the department had no internal fire station facility, the spokesperson said. The chief toured the exterior of the

for signs of fire, and seeing nothing but a "cloud formation" outside, according to the spokesperson.

A week and a half later, Tesla announced it was [shutting down](#) its operations temporarily to make some improvements. (Tesla also shut down operations for a week in May for planned upgrades.)

Improper maintenance and product issues reported

 [Elon Musk tells employees Tesla will streamline management](#)

Here's the memo Elon Musk just sent announcing a major shakeup at Tesla

1:31 PM ET Mon, 14 May 2018 | 00:46

Fires like these are not common in auto manufacturing. It is especially dangerous for a plant to have multiple fires in a paint shop.

According to the most recent available data from the [National Fire Protection Association](#), local fire departments respond to 190 fires per year on average in shop areas of factories and processing facilities. That is just 4 percent of all fires in manufacturing.

The rate of paint-shop fires in auto plants is far lower than that, said an OSHA officer and senior vice president of safety and health at [Levinson](#) in Indiana.

"For the most part, corporations know how to control fire hazards in their operations, and work to establish a safety culture," said Reason. "In the case of paint-shop fires, you really need to audit your paint shop and make sure it not only meets that means redesigning the whole thing."

A spokesperson for GM manufacturing, Dan Flores, noted: "At GM, a fire in a paint shop is an extremely rare occurrence — that's because our operations are in a very controlled manner."

Two Tesla employees say that vehicle production goals have been prioritized in recent months, sometimes at the expense of fire and environmental safety. One said, for example, that months before the April fire, the sprinkler system was coated at least an inch thick of paint and clear-coat. Filters below the exhaust systems that clean and carry air into and out of the build bay were also coated, they added.

A former paint shop employee said associates there are given minimal training when they need to meet OSHA safety requirements — before they are permitted to work. They need more specialized skills. The result is that while Tesla has invested in fire-fighting equipment, these inexperienced employees don't follow best practices, creating unsafe jobs and a potentially unsafe environment, according to the former employee on condition of anonymity.

Workers are hopeful things may soon change. Since early April, Tesla has replaced its sprinkler heads, and put out a request for quotes on new air filtration equipment.

On a [tense earnings call](#) in May, Musk plainly acknowledged that the Fremont factory poses a risk to mass-production of the Model 3 e

