

Tesla says their autopilot and lithium ion batteries killed driver

by Kevin Forestieri / Mountain View Voice

The driver who died in a fiery crash on Highway 101 last week had his Tesla's Autopilot engaged before the crash, according to a statement released by the company Friday night.



The driver of a Tesla Model X had turned on the vehicle's Autopilot function moments before the crash. Image courtesy of the Mountain View Fire Department.

San Mateo resident Wei Huang, 38, crashed into a highway barrier separating southbound Highway 101 from the Highway 85 carpool flyover lane shortly before 9:30 a.m. on Friday, March 23. The Tesla struck the median at freeway speeds, triggering a three-vehicle accident and causing the car to catch fire. Huang was transported to Stanford Hospital with major injuries, where he later died.

Tesla retrieved the vehicle logs from Huang's vehicle, a Model X, and determined that the Autopilot system was engaged at 9:27 a.m., moments before the collision with the "adaptive cruise control follow-distance set to a minimum," according to a blog post from the company.

As Huang approached the barrier, he had received "several visual" warnings and an audible warning to take control of the vehicle again, according to the post. But data from the vehicle shows that 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," according to the statement.

Earlier this week, ABC7 News [reported](#) that Huang's family said Huang had frequent trouble with the Autopilot system on the Model X, and took it to his dealer on multiple occasions claiming that the Autopilot veered towards the same Highway 101 barrier that his vehicle collided with on March 23.

Tesla officials argued in the blog post that while the company's Autopilot system doesn't prevent all accidents, it has maintained a strong safety track record since its rollout over a year ago. The blog post claims that there is only one fatality for every 320 million miles traveled by vehicles with the function -- significantly lower than the average in the U.S. of one death per 86 million miles traveled.

"Tesla Autopilot does not prevent all accidents -- such a standard would be impossible -- but it makes them much less likely to occur," according to the blog post. "It unequivocally makes the world safer for the vehicle occupants, pedestrians and cyclists."

The National Transportation Safety Board announced on Tuesday, March 27, that it was stepping in to [investigate the crash](#) as well as the subsequent emergency response. Battery fires in electric vehicles can reach temperatures of 900 degrees and require thousands of gallons of water to extinguish, but fire crews had little access to a water supply in the middle of the highway.

Tesla engineers came out to the scene of the crash to assist the Mountain View Fire Department in getting the battery under control.

In an initial blog post about the accident on March 27, Tesla officials stated that the attenuator barrier, a buffer designed to cushion a collision with the cement median of the

Highway 85 flyover, had either been "removed or crushed" without an adequate replacement, which added to the severity of the crash.

"We have never seen this level of damage to a Model X in any other crash," according to the post.