

US opens Tesla safety review, company orders changes

WASHINGTON, USA: A US government agency said it was investigating fires in Tesla electric vehicles, as the company ordered modifications aimed at reducing what it called a negligible risk.



Tesla denies there's a risk of its Model S cars catching fire. Image: Tesla

The move by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) came after Tesla requested such a probe, saying it wanted to quash any false perceptions about the safety of electric cars.

The NHTSA said in a statement it had opened a formal investigation to determine if a safety defect exists in certain Tesla Model S vehicles.

The investigation was prompted by recent incidents in Washington State and Tennessee that resulted in battery fires because of undercarriage strikes with roadway debris," according to the statement, emailed to AFP.

Documents posted on the NHTSA website said the agency will examine the potential risks associated with undercarriage strikes.

Just ahead of the news, Tesla founder Elon Musk claimed in a blog post that there is no safer car on the road than the Model S, but said the company would make changes to reduce fire risk.

"We have rolled out an over-the-air update to the air suspension that will result in greater ground clearance at highway speeds," Musk said.

Musk asks US agency to investigate the fires

"To be clear, this is about reducing the chances of underbody impact damage, not improving safety. The theoretical probability of a fire injury is already astonishingly small and the actual number to date is zero," said Musk

Musk also said he was asking the US safety agency for a full investigation as soon as possible into the fire incidents.

"While we think it is highly unlikely, if something is discovered that would result in a material improvement fire safety, we will immediately apply that change to new cars and offer it as a free retrofit to all existing cars," Musk said.

He added that the incidence of fires in the Model S is far lower than combustion cars and that there have been no resulting injuries, but said such a probe would reassure customers.

"There is a larger issue at stake: if a false perception about the safety of electric cars is allowed to linger, it will delay the advent of sustainable transport and increase the risk of global climate change, with potentially disastrous consequences worldwide," Musk wrote.

Musk also said that in order to reinforce how strongly Tesla feels about the low risk of fire in its cars, the company will amend its warranty policy to cover damage due to a fire, even if it's caused by driver error.

He said this warranty would be voided unless an owner of a Model S deliberately tries to destroy the car.



Tesla founder Elon Musk says the cars are completely safe. Image: Twitter

Tesla - with a US\$75,000 price tag - is a marque has been extremely successful but a video showing a Tesla going up in flames on a street near Seattle, Washington has damaged the company's reputation.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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