

Uber pulls self-driving cars from California roads

December 22 2016, by Sudhin Thanawala



In this Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, file photo, Devin Greene sits in the front seat of an Uber driverless car during a test drive in San Francisco. Uber has pulled its self-driving cars from California roads. The ride-sharing company said Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2016, California transportation regulators revoke registrations for the vehicles. The DMV confirmed that it had moved to revoke the registrations of 16 cars, saying officials had been determined that the registrations were improperly issued because the vehicles were not properly marked as test vehicles. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

Uber pulled its self-driving cars from California roads after state regulators moved to revoke their registrations, officials said Wednesday.

The move comes after a week of talks between the ride-hailing [company](#) and [state regulators](#) failed.

Hours after Uber launched the service in its hometown of San Francisco last Wednesday, the Department of Motor Vehicles threatened legal action if the company did not stop. The cars need the same special permit as the 20 other companies testing self-driving technology in California, regulators argued.

Uber maintains it does not need a permit because the cars are not sophisticated enough to continuously drive themselves, although the company promotes them as "self-driving."

The DMV said the registrations for the vehicles were improperly issued because they were not properly marked as test vehicles. It invited Uber to seek a permit so their vehicles could operate legally in California—an offer the company said it did not plan to accept.

Uber said in a statement that it was looking for where it could redeploy the cars, but remained 100 percent committed to California and would redouble its efforts "to develop workable statewide rules."

San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee said he was "pleased to hear that the DMV took enforcement action."

"I have always been a strong supporter of innovation and autonomous vehicle development and testing, but only under conditions that put human, bicyclist and pedestrian safety first," he said in a statement.

The ride-sharing company says the cars must constantly be monitored by

a human driver trained to take control at any time, so they don't fall under California's permitting requirements for "autonomous vehicles."

Parsing the definition of an autonomous vehicle is the latest example of Uber testing legal boundaries. In recent years, the company has argued with authorities in California and elsewhere about how to check the criminal backgrounds of its human drivers and whether those drivers should be treated as contractors or employees.

San Francisco is Uber's second self-driving city; its first cars have been cruising around Pittsburgh since September. The testing lets Uber identify glitches and gives everyday people a chance to interact with the technology—whether as a passenger, pedestrian or driver in another car.



In this Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, file photo, an Uber driverless car is displayed in a garage in San Francisco. Uber has pulled its self-driving cars from California roads. The ride-sharing company said Wednesday, Dec. 21, California transportation regulators revoke registrations for the vehicles. (AP Photo/Eric

Risberg, File)

As its engineers improve the technology, Uber plans to bring [self-driving cars](#) to other cities.

Operating without a permit arguably gives Uber a competitive advantage. Companies with one must report all crashes to the state and every instance in which a person takes control during testing. All that information is public.

Waymo, a self-driving company created by Google that has a state permit, has disclosed 29 accidents involving its vehicles on public streets since 2010.

In Pittsburgh, Uber has not been required to release any information about crashes.

Waymo CEO John Krafcik declined to discuss Uber specifically when asked last week about California's permitting requirements for testing self-driving cars. But, he said, "If there is a competitor taking unnecessary risks, that could be a bad thing."

It didn't take long for Uber's self-driving cars to draw unwanted attention in San Francisco. Several witnesses documented instances where Uber Volvos didn't stop for red lights.

Uber said one incident in front of the city's Museum of Modern Art illustrated why its cars require constant monitoring by a human driver—and therefore didn't need a state permit.

San Francisco also has an active bicycle culture, and some have

criticized Uber for deploying cars that make right "hook" turns across bike lanes at intersections.

The executive director of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition said that on a test ride Uber gave him before the launch, the car twice made such turns. Brian Wiedenmeier said he told Uber officials and they promised to fix it. He said he got reports of other such turns on the pilot project's first day, but not since.

Before the San Francisco launch, the company said it told all employees sitting in the driver's seat to take the wheel for such turns.

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