

Uber self-driving car exec steps aside during Google lawsuit

April 28 2017, by Michael Liedtke



In this Dec. 13, 2016, file photo, Anthony Levandowski, head of Uber's self-driving program, speaks about their driverless car in San Francisco. Levandowski, an autonomous vehicle expert who defected from Google last year, notified Uber's staff of that he is stepping aside Thursday, April 27, 2017, in an email. He will remain at Uber, but won't oversee a crucial self-driving project targeted in lawsuit filed by Waymo, a rival started by Google. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File)

The executive running Uber's self-driving car division is stepping aside while the company defends itself against charges that he provided the project with technology stolen from a Google spinoff.

Anthony Levandowski, an autonomous vehicle expert who defected from Google last year, notified Uber's staff of his decision in a Thursday email. The change was made in tandem with Uber CEO Travis Kalanick, according to the email.

Although Levandowski will remain at Uber, he won't be overseeing a crucial autonomous-car project while the ride-hailing service is locked in a [legal showdown](#) with Waymo, a rival started by Google eight years ago. Instead of reporting directly to Kalanick, Levandowski now will be under the supervision of a former subordinate, Eric Meyhofer, appointed to replace him during the Waymo battle.

Waymo filed a lawsuit in February accusing Levandowski of illegally downloading its blueprints for a navigation [technology](#) known as lidar before founding a startup that he later sold to Uber for \$680 million.

That deal brought to Uber most of the employees now working in the company's Advanced Technologies Group that's building [self-driving cars](#).

Waymo is seeking a court order that would force Uber to stop its work on autonomous vehicles on the grounds that the project has been drawing on trade secrets taken by Levandowski before he left Google.

Uber has denied its self-driving cars are using Waymo's technology.

A hearing on Waymo's request for an injunction against Uber is scheduled for May 3. If a federal judge sides with Waymo, it could hobble Uber's efforts to catch up in the still-developing field of robot-

driven cars. Such vehicles could revolutionize transportation, including the rapidly growing ride-hailing industry.

In his email, Levandowski told employees to keep him out of any discussions about Uber's work on its lidar system while reminding them that all of the company's self-driving car technology "has been built independently, from the ground up." By recusing himself, he wrote, "I hope to keep the team focused on achieving the vision that brought us all here."

Levandowski has added to the intrigue swirling around the high-profile case by invoking his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination, raising the possibility that Waymo's civil lawsuit might trigger a criminal investigation into what happened.

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