

US investigating battery fire in fatal Tesla crash

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The US National Transportation Safety Board on Wednesday sent a team to investigate a Tesla Model S crash that left two people dead and another injured in Florida.

The 2014 Tesla was reportedly traveling at high speed when it hit a wall then caught fire on Tuesday, the NTSB said in a release.

Autopilot self-driving capabilities of the Tesla were not expected to be involved, the NTSB said.

Two 18-year-old Florida men died in the crash, while a third was hospitalized, according to local media reports that said it remained to be determined why the Tesla went off a road and slammed into a wall.

NTSB investigators dispatched Wednesday were to focus on a battery fire ignited by the crash in the coastal city of Fort Lauderdale.

"NTSB has a long history of investigating emerging transportation technologies, such as lithium ion battery fires in commercial aviation," NTSB chairman Robert Sumwalt said in a release.

"The goal of these investigations is to understand the impact of these emerging transportation technologies when they are part of a transportation accident."

A Tesla statement published in Florida media reports said the car maker

is cooperating with investigators and it did not appear that the Autopilot feature was engaged at the time of the crash.

In a spat with NTSB, Tesla last month said it "withdrew" from an agreement to participate in the investigation into a fiery March 23 crash in California that involved its "Autopilot" feature.

But the NTSB announced the "removal of Tesla," after the company disclosed information the agency said could taint the public understanding of what happened, in violation of the agreement.

Tesla hit back at the statement from the independent federal agency that investigates aviation and transit [accidents](#), and questioned its motives.

"Among other things, they repeatedly released partial bits of incomplete information to the media in violation of their own rules, at the same time that they were trying to prevent us from telling all the facts," Tesla said at the time.

"We don't believe this is right and we will be making an official complaint to Congress."

The NTSB is investigating the accident that led to the death of a 38-year-old father of two, Walter Huang.

Tesla has released several statements on the accident, including a March 30 blog post that expressed sorrow for the family but defended its technology and pointed responsibility for the crash on the driver.

Huang's hands were "not detected on the wheel for six seconds prior to the collision," Tesla said in the blog.

The company also noted that the accident occurred at a confusing

highway interchange, and the protective shield on the concrete barrier involved in the [crash](#) was not in proper condition.

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