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Are Pedestrians Safe From Driverless Cars?

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In recent years, the emergence of driverless cars has sparked both excitement and concern regarding their impact on road safety, particularly for pedestrians. Two notable incidents have brought this issue to the forefront: the October 2023 collision involving a pedestrian in downtown San Francisco, and the tragic death of Elaine Herzberg in Tempe, Arizona, in 2018.

The incident in San Francisco, where a pedestrian was critically injured and trapped underneath a driverless car operated by Cruise, has raised questions about the safety protocols and accountability of autonomous vehicles. According to footage [obtained by CNN](#), the pedestrian was struck by a manned vehicle before being propelled into the path of the autonomous car. Following the incident, Cruise recalled nearly 1,000 vehicles nationwide due to posing a danger to public safety. California's DMV revoked the license for Cruise to operate there. Currently, Cruise is permitted to operate in San Francisco with human operators behind the wheel. This incident really underscored the complexities of pedestrian safety and liability, according to [Denver pedestrian accident lawyers](#) who handle these types of cases.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time that a pedestrian had been involved in a dangerous collision with a self-driving vehicle. The death of Elaine Herzberg in Tempe, Arizona, marked the first recorded case of a pedestrian fatality involving a self-driving car. Herzberg was pushing a bicycle across a four-lane road when she was struck by an Uber test vehicle operating in self-drive mode. Despite efforts to revive her, Herzberg succumbed to her injuries at a local hospital.

In the aftermath of Herzberg's death, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) issued recommendations and sharply criticized Uber for its safety protocols. Uber suspended testing of self-driving vehicles in Arizona and chose not to renew its permit for testing in California. While Arizona prosecutors ruled that Uber was not criminally responsible for the crash, the backup driver of the vehicle [was charged](#) with negligent homicide.

These incidents highlight the critical importance of collision avoidance systems for self-driving vehicles. The Arizona incident, in particular, has intensified scrutiny and raised concerns about the safety standards and regulatory oversight of autonomous transportation. As technology continues to evolve, ensuring the safety of pedestrians remains a paramount concern for developers, regulators, and society at large.

The comparison drawn between Herzberg's fate and that of Bridget Driscoll, the first pedestrian killed by an automobile in the United Kingdom in 1896, serves as a sobering reminder of the profound impact that emerging technologies can have on public safety. Moving forward,

collaborative efforts between industry stakeholders, policymakers, and safety advocates will be essential to address these challenges and pave the way for a safer future of transportation.

In between these incidents has been a growing number of accidents involving driverless cars in, raising questions about their overall safety and readiness for public roads. Here's a look at some recent incidents just in San Francisco:

- August 2023: A Waymo self-driving car collided with a bicyclist in San Francisco, causing minor injuries.
- July 2023: A Cruise driverless car ran a red light in San Francisco, narrowly avoiding a collision.
- May 2023: A Waymo self-driving car malfunctioned and stopped in the middle of a busy San Francisco intersection, causing traffic congestion.

While no fatalities have been directly attributed to driverless car accidents in California, these incidents and the fatality in Arizona highlight the potential risks associated with this emerging technology.

In the wake of these tragedies, it is crucial for companies like Cruise, Waymo, and others to [prioritize safety above all else](#). This includes conducting thorough testing, implementing robust safety measures, and collaborating with regulators to establish clear guidelines for the development and operation of self-driving vehicles.

Only through transparency, accountability, and a commitment to safety can we ensure that the promise of self-driving cars becomes a reality without further endangering lives.

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