Tesla driver killed in crash while using 'Autopilot'

By JOAN LOWY
and TOM KRISHER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The first fatal injury directly linked to a Tesla car operating the vehicle’s "Autopilot" automated driving system died after a collision with a truck in Florida, federal officials said Thursday.

The government is investigating the crash to determine whether the driver was using "Autopilot" at the time. Preliminary reports indicate the driver was using the system.

By the time firefighters arrived, the wreck was "screaming red," said the driver of a pickup truck that was in front of the Tesla, which veered off into the median and hit the big rig, said Maj. Fredaj Shugard of the Florida Highway Safety Administration.

The driver of a Tesla Model S died in the collision, said the city’s fire chief, Brian Farmer.

Tesla said on its website that neither the driver nor the Model S was hurt in the April 30, 2016 crash. "The driver was operating on a Model S with Autopilot enabled and on ' Summon,'" Tesla said in a statement.

"Autopilot" is a $6,200 option on Tesla cars that allows drivers to take their hands off the wheel while driving on city and highway roads. Safety-features on the system, such as lane departure warning and automatic emergency braking, can take control of the vehicle in case the driver fails to respond.

Tesla said in a statement that it "remains committed to making the roads safer for all users." The company added that it "will continue to improve the Autopilot system to make it more effective for drivers who choose to use it."