

# New report finds Tesla withheld workplace injury data from government

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Electric auto manufacturer Tesla, Inc. hid hundreds of workplace injury reports from Cal/OSHA, the California state division of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), according to a memorandum that the agency sent in December. The injuries were listed in company logs but were omitted from annual summary data that the company self-reported to the government.

The news of the willfully omitted reports comes amid an ongoing investigation into consumer complaints against Tesla for a defect which causes the sudden unintended acceleration of all three of its available vehicle models and has led to 110 crashes and 52 injuries.

According to *Bloomberg*, some of the documents that revealed the omissions were obtained through a public records request. Cal/OSHA acknowledged that it is normal for some discrepancies to arise when companies give annual injury reports to the government because the company may discover new injuries that were not logged before the reports were submitted. However, significant discrepancies in reporting such as those found with Tesla indicate that “a company should consider whether its processes are ‘adequate to verify accuracy.’”

Cal/OSHA reported that Tesla underreported its 2018 workplace injury summary by four percent, and also that Tesla’s workplace injuries were underreported by an astounding 44 percent two years prior in 2016. The latest revelations stand in contrast to statements made by Tesla’s CEO Elon Musk on a 2018 earnings call to investors that the company was engaged in workplace safety efforts, including the claim that Tesla was not underreporting injuries and that Cal/OSHA had been investigating.

Tesla has a total of 45 safety inspections on record with Cal/OSHA, with three so far this year; the most recent reported inspection was March 2. Many of the cases closed by the state agency have resulted in serious

citations for violations of workplace health and safety regulations.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) uses companies’ reported annual summary logs to calculate the total work-related injury and illness rates per year per 100 full-time employees. The BLS found the overall workplace injury and illness rate for auto manufacturing to be 6.1 in 2018. According to Tesla’s reported incidents for 2018, the injury rate for the company itself adds up to a rate of 6.2, above the already high industry average. With the 36 or so incidents that Cal/OSHA says were omitted, Tesla’s own rate increases to 6.5.

Tesla has had a reputation as one of the most dangerous auto manufacturing companies at which to work. Workers at Tesla plants often work 60 to 70 hours per week with mandatory overtime, and severe injuries are a predictable consequence. Furthermore, the workers are often paid as little as \$16-\$21 per hour, poverty or near-poverty wages, while the cars they create sell for between \$35,000 and \$81,000 depending on the model.

This blatant disregard for workers’ safety and health has been a key factor in the dizzying growth of the company’s profits. Shares of the company’s stock (NASDAQ: TSLA) hover around \$690, and last month after a stock surge, Musk’s net worth rose by \$4.5 billion in just one day. Musk, who recently tweeted that “[t]he coronavirus panic is dumb,” is currently the fastest-rising global billionaire with his wealth increasing \$316 million every day so far this year. He could possibly overtake Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos as the richest man in the world.

Production workers at Tesla vehicle plants are not union represented, even as the United Auto Workers (UAW) has unsuccessfully attempted to organize workers at the company. The fact of the matter is it would not have made any real difference in terms of workers’ safety, wages, or working hours if the UAW or any other union were

present in the plants.

Workers at Ford, Fiat/Chrysler and General Motors, who are members of the UAW, suffer from long working hours, high rates of injury and illness, and face poverty wages and declining living standards. They often face victimization by both the union and company management for speaking out against the grueling working conditions. As the ongoing federal investigation of UAW corruption has demonstrated, the union acts as little more than a bought and paid for subsidiary of management.

Cuts to funding, especially to inspection staff, have plagued OSHA under successive Democratic and Republican administrations over the past several decades. OSHA performed 32,023 workplace safety inspections in 2018, compared to 39,228 in 2013. Total inspections have steadily decreased overall during this five-year period.

Such inexcusable negligence is an indictment of the official government agencies tasked with regulating workplace safety. These organizations are subordinated to the interests of the profit system, and often do nothing more than impose token fines on corporations found to be in serious violations of safety regulations. The result is often nothing more than toothless recommendations for safety workplace safety, which have no real impact on working conditions.

Neither the unions nor the Democratic Party, to which they are tied, or government agencies like OSHA are capable of protecting workers' right to a safe and healthy work environment, under conditions where billionaires like Musk control every aspect of economic and political life. The case of Tesla demonstrates once again that workers' rights to a healthy and safe work environment is incompatible with a system the subordinates the needs of the world's working class to the profit interests of a handful of ultrawealthy oligarchs.



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