

## Autonomous Vehicles are Reshaping Legal Liability on the Roads

Abigail Downs

As autonomous vehicle technology advances and automakers race to bring self-driving cars into the mainstream, a complex new landscape of questions emerge regarding legal liability. The arrival of driverless cars is fundamentally shifting who or what is responsible when accidents occur. Traditionally, fault in car crashes falls on the human driver who made mistakes or drove negligently. But with autonomous vehicles there is no human driver in control. This leads to various questions about liability when a self-driving car crashes: Is it the artificial intelligence system that made the mistake? The companies that developed the AI software? Or the automaker that built the physical vehicle?

These uncertainties create a legal minefield that courts and regulators are beginning to navigate. Current laws and liability precedents do not account for vehicles capable of making their own driving decisions without human input. Insurance policies and risk models will also likely need major overhauls. How can insurers evaluate risk and price premiums when the "drivers" are computers rather than human minds? Challenging questions also arise surrounding data privacy, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and how autonomous systems should be programmed to make ethical decisions that could impact lives—such as whether to veer into head-on traffic or hit a pedestrian in a split-second decision.

The interaction between human drivers and autonomous vehicles adds another layer of complexity. In situations where both share the road, determining fault becomes even more challenging. Legal clarity is needed on how to apportion responsibility when human error interacts with autonomous vehicle system failures. As technology evolves, questions regarding ongoing monitoring, maintenance, and updates of autonomous systems will also need resolved. Ensuring manufacturers maintain the safety and efficiency of their AI systems over a vehicle's lifespan presents another challenge for regulators.

As of 2018, twenty-nine U.S. states had enacted laws regulating autonomous vehicles, and federal guidelines are emerging. However, many legal experts feel the existing patchwork fails to adequately address liability issues certain to arise with widespread self-driving vehicles. In this rapidly evolving landscape, collaboration between lawmakers, AI developers, vehicle industry leaders, and legal experts will be essential to develop new legal frameworks addressing the different implications of self-driving vehicles.

For more information, check out the full article [here](#).