



American College of
Emergency Physicians®

ADVANCING EMERGENCY CARE 

POLICY STATEMENT

Approved January 2019

Autonomous Self-Driving Vehicles

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More than one hundred Americans die daily in motor vehicle accidents, and many more are injured or severely disabled. Worldwide, the death toll is well over one million annually. Innovations in autonomous vehicle technology have the potential to drastically reduce transportation-related injuries while improving access to health care for vulnerable populations and reducing the cost and time spent on transportation.

Decades of analysis of conventional automobile crashes have led to incremental improvements in safety. Because the lessons learned from smart vehicle near-misses and incidents can be more readily analyzed and disseminated, the advent of these technologies will accelerate this quality improvement process. When fully mature, the technology piloting autonomous vehicles will operate with the encoded equivalent of centuries of human driving experience. Eventually, these transportation systems will be much safer than the vehicles of today.

Injuries involving self-driving cars have garnered public attention because of the novelty of the incidents and the technology involved. Incomplete reporting has the potential to sour public opinion and delay by years the advent of smart transportation systems. Unlike previous innovations such as seat belts and airbags, increased vehicle autonomy will be accompanied by a complex and inevitable shift in liability from drivers to product manufacturers and service providers, potentially endangering the development and widespread availability of this potentially life-saving technology.

Given the significant societal benefits of mature autonomous vehicle technology, the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP):

- Encourages a coordinated effort by advocacy groups, transportation companies, vehicle manufacturers, federal and state agencies, and the medical community to leverage autonomous vehicle technology to reduce the injury and death associated with transportation.
- Urges its members to provide a leadership role in defining public policy, developing guidelines and securing adequate funding for enhancement and implementation of autonomous transportation systems, as well as performing and evaluating outcomes research to determine the public health impact of this new technology.

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- Supports the exploration of strategies to define and mitigate liabilities.
- Encourages state governments and local municipalities to actively oversee and promote the prudent use and fielding of appropriately tested autonomous driving systems on public roads.
- Applauds the innovative efforts of lawmakers and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to update the regulatory framework to facilitate the development of driverless technologies while maximizing public safety.