

Federal agency will investigate Tesla crash that killed two young students burning them alive

By Linda Trischitta, David Lyons, Tonya Alanez and Wayne K. Rouston / Sun Sentinel FORT

LAUDERDALE — Two handsome young men “as close as brothers” were supposed to be attending college in the fall. Instead, their families and classmates are mourning them after a fiery crash of an electric car on a curvy road on Fort Lauderdale beach.

Driver Barrett Riley, of Fort Lauderdale, and front-seat passenger Edgar Monserratt Martinez, of Aventura, both 18 and students at Pine Crest School, were trapped in the burning wreck and died horribly in Tuesday’s crash, police and fire officials said. Another passenger, also 18, was taken to a hospital.

The trio were traveling in a Tesla Model S sedan along Seabreeze Boulevard before it crashed into a concrete wall, police said.

Fort Lauderdale Police said the Tesla’s speed was believed to have been a factor in the crash, but they could not say where the fire began or its cause.

The Tesla does not use a gasoline-powered engine and is powered by a battery. The National Transportation Safety Board said it was sending a team to Fort Lauderdale Wednesday to investigate, to “primarily focus on emergency response in relation to the electric vehicle battery fire, including fire department activities and towing operations.”

The NTSB said it has a history of investigating “emerging transportation technologies” to “understand the impact” of such technologies when part of transportation accidents.

“The chemicals inside the battery cells can be corrosive and flammable,” said Karl Brauer, executive public affairs officer for Autotrader and Kelley Blue Book. “Electric vehicles are not more prone to fire, but batteries can burn in fires that are harder to extinguish. Once there is a fire and you melt the battery pack, chemicals come out. When those chemicals come out, the fire can start, even without a spark.”

Tesla issued a statement about the fatal crash that it said involved a longtime customer.

“Our thoughts are with the families and friends affected by this tragedy,” the company said. “The family who owned the car has been a close friend of Tesla for many years, and this hits us particularly hard. We are working to establish the facts of the incident and offer our full cooperation to the local authorities.”

Tesla also said Wednesday it had not yet been able to retrieve logs from the vehicle, “but everything we have seen thus far indicates a very high-speed