

TESLA CAUGHT IN MORE LIES AS TESLA HIDES FACTORY AND DRIVER DEATHS AND INJURIES

- **A new report from Reveal** claims that **Tesla** has underreported workplace injuries and claims the Fremont factory is less safe than the company has said.
- **The report also claims that Tesla** has avoided using some warning signs and markings for aesthetic reasons and failed to properly train employees for dangerous work.

In February, Tesla [highlighted its efforts to improve worker safety](#) at the Fremont, California, factory where it builds its vehicles. Laurie Shelby — Tesla's vice president of environmental, health, and safety — wrote that the company's total recordable incident rate (TRIR), had fallen 25% since 2016 and was aligned with the industry average. Shelby also outlined the steps the company had taken in an effort to better manage and prevent workplace injuries.

But a [new report from Reveal](#) alleges that conditions at the facility are not as safe as Tesla claims. Reveal's investigators interviewed employees and reviewed hundreds of documents.

Here's an overview of the report's claims:

- **Tesla reportedly misrepresented workplace injury statistics while at work or mislabeling workplace injury statistics.**
- **Tesla didn't mark some hazard areas at Fremont in yellow because Musk reportedly doesn't like the color and avoided other safety signs and markings for aesthetic reasons, the report claims.**
- **The rate of serious injuries, which means they require employees to miss work or work with restrictions, among Tesla employees was reportedly 30% worse than the industry average in 2017.**
- **Some Fremont employees received insufficient training for dangerous work, the report claims.**
- **At least one employee warned superiors — including Elon Musk's office — about potential safety hazards, but those warnings were reportedly either ignored or not addressed.**

On Monday, Tesla responded to the report [in a blog post](#), calling it "a completely false picture of Tesla and what it is actually like to work here," and claimed it was "an ideologically motivated attack by an extremist organization working directly with union supporters to create a [calculated disinformation campaign against Tesla](#)."

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Tesla says its factory is safer. But it left injuries

By *Will Evans* and *Alyssa Jeong Perry* / April 16, 2018

Inside Tesla's electric car factory, giant red robots – some named for X-Men characters – heave car parts in the air, while workers wearing black toils on aluminum car bodies. Forklifts and tuggers zip by on gray-painted floors, differentiated from pedestrian walkways by another shade of gray.

There's one color, though, that some of Tesla's former safety experts wanted to see more of: yellow – the traditional hue of caution used to mark hazards.

Concerned about bone-crunching collisions and the lack of clearly marked pedestrian lanes at the Fremont, California, plant, the general assembly line's then-lead safety professional went to her boss, who she said told her, "Elon does not like the

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Robots work on Model S cars in Tesla's factory in Fremont, Calif., in 2015. One color that some of Tesla's former safety experts wanted to see more of is yellow, the traditional hue of caution used to mark hazards.

Credit: Jeff Chiu/Associated Press

The melding of cutting-edge technology and world-saving vision is Tesla Inc.'s big draw. Many, including Justine White, the safety lead, went to work there inspired by Elon Musk, a CEO with star power and now

were inspired by Elon Musk, a CEO with star power and now **agroundbreaking rocket** in space.

What she and some of her colleagues found, they said, was a chaotic factory floor where style and speed trumped safety. Musk's name often was invoked to justify shortcuts and shoot down concerns, they said.

Under fire for mounting injuries, Tesla recently **touted a sharp drop** in its injury rate for 2017, which it says came down to meet the auto industry average of about 6.2 injuries per 100 workers.

But things are not always as they seem at Tesla.

An **investigation** by **Reveal** from The Center for Investigative Reporting found that Tesla has failed to report some of its serious injuries on legally mandated reports, making them **appear** better than they actually are.

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Last April, Tarik Logan suffered debilitating headaches from the fumes of a toxic glue he had to use at the plant. He texted his mom: “I’m n hella pain foreal something ain’t right.”

The searing pain became so unbearable he couldn’t work, and it plagued him for weeks.

But Logan’s inhalation injury, as it was diagnosed, never made it onto the official injury logs that state and federal law requires companies to keep. Neither did reports from other factory workers of sprains, strains and repetitive stress injuries from piecing together Tesla’s sleek cars.

Instead, company officials labeled the injuries personal medical issues or minor incidents requiring only first aid, according to internal company records obtained by Reveal.

IN COLLABORAT



Undercounting injuries is one symptom of a more fundamental problem at Tesla: The company has put its manufacturing of electric cars above safety concerns, according to five former members of its environment, health and safety team who left the company last year. That, they said, has put workers unnecessarily in harm's way.

At one point, White said she warned superiors about a potential explosion hazard but was told they would defer to production managers because fixing the problem would require stopping the production line.

From September 2016 to January 2017, a team of workers on Tesla's Gen 1 factory reviewed 722 injuries, reviewing injuries at the Fremont factory for hazards.

"Everything took a back seat to production," White said. "It's just a matter of time before somebody gets killed."

Tesla, worth about \$50 billion, employs more than 10,000 workers at its Fremont factory. Alongside the company's remarkable rise, workers have been sliced by machinery, crushed by forklifts, burned in electrical explosions and sprayed with molten metal. Tesla recorded **722 injuries** last year, about two a day. The rate of serious injuries, requiring time off or a work restriction, was 30 percent worse than the previous year's industry average.

Frantic growth, constant changes and lax rules, combined with a CEO whom senior managers were afraid to cross, created an atmosphere in which few dared to stand up for worker safety, the former environment, health and safety team members told Reveal.

And in addition to yellow, Musk was said to dislike too many signs in the factory and the warning beeps forklifts make when backing up, former team members said. His preferences, they said, were well known and led to cutting back on those standard safety signals.

"If someone said, 'Elon doesn't like something,' you were concerned because you could lose your job," said Susan Rigmaiden, former environmental compliance manager.

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A few months into her job, White became so alarmed that she **wrote** to a human resources manager that “the risk of injury is too high. People are getting hurt every day and near-hit incidents where people are getting almost crushed or hit by cars is unacceptable.”

The next day, she **emailed** Sam Teller, Musk’s chief of staff, that safety team leaders were failing to address the hazards.

“I know what can keep a person up at night regarding safety,” she wrote. “I must tell you that I can’t sleep here at Tesla.”

She said she never heard back from Musk’s office. She transferred departments and quit a couple months later, disillusioned.

In her March 2017 **resignation** letter to her boss, Seth Woody, “that we’re not doing enough for pedestrians.” Woody, however, “didn’t want signs, anything yet” and “acknowledged the plant” and acknowledged the hazards.

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She sent the letter directly to Musk and the head of human resources at the time – to no response, she said. Woody did not respond to inquiries.

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Tesla quality inspector Dennis Cruz has had a series of injuries that took him off the production line. At one point, living on workers' compensation payments because of work-induced tendinitis, he ended up living in his car, unable to afford rent.

Credit: Emily Harger for Reveal

Tesla officials dismissed all of White's concerns as unsubstantiated. They insisted that the company records injuries accurately and cares deeply about the safety of its workers. As proof, company officials said a recent anonymous internal survey found 82 percent of employees agreed that "Tesla is committed to my health, safety and well-being."

Before publication of this story, a Tesla spokesman sent a [statement](#) accusing Reveal of being a tool in an ongoing unionization drive and portraying "a completely false picture of Tesla and what it is actually like to work here."

"In our view, what they portray as investigative journalism is in fact an ideologically motivated attack by an extremist organization working directly with union supporters to create a calculated disinformation campaign against Tesla," the statement said.

Tesla's spokesman also sent photos of rails and posts in the factory that were painted yellow.

Reveal interviewed more than three dozen current and former employees and managers and reviewed hundreds of pages of documents. Some of the workers who spoke to Reveal have supported the unionization effort, while many others — including safety professionals — had no involvement

many others — including safety professionals — had no involvement.

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A chaotic factory floor

On one hand, Tesla boasts state-of-the-art machinery that makes it “like

working for Iron Man,” as one former employee described it. On the other, the company relied on hoists that weren’t engineered or inspected before they were used to lift heavy car parts, according to a former safety team member, resulting in repeated accidents.

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At Tesla’s electric car factory in Fremont, Calif., CEO Elon Musk’s name often was invoked to shortcuts and shoot down safety concerns, former safety experts for the company say.

Credit: Paul Sakuma/Associated Press

The company is under immense pressure to ramp up manufacturing of the new Model 3 sedan, its first mass-market vehicle at \$35,000. Musk initially said Tesla would be producing **20,000 of them per month** by the end of 2017 but the company **just missed** its scaled-back promise to produce half that number.

Tesla is often in a state of frenzied production. Former employees said they faced 12-hour workdays, faulty equipment and paltry training as they scrambled to come up with workarounds on the fly to get cars out the door.

The hustle meant that health and safety protocols could literally get left in the dust. Last year, construction workers cut through concrete to build the new Model 3 assembly line, spreading silica dust – which can cause cancer – without containing and testing it first, Rigmaiden and two other former members of the health and safety team said.

Despite the high stakes for life and limb, the safety professionals maintain safety training has been woefully inadequate. The company said all workers receive at least four days of training. But new employees often were pulled out of training early to fill spots on the factory floor, White and another former safety team member said.

Team members were reluctant to speak to reporters, but said they agreed to in order to help improve safety. Some asked to remain anonymous to protect their careers.

In an interview, Tesla CEO Elon Musk said the company in May, repeated safety professionals' concerns about their own job."

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Toledano touted the hiring in October of Laurie Shelby as Tesla's first vice president for environment, health and safety as an improvement in itself.

"Anybody who walks through our doors into this factory is our responsibility, and we care about them," said Shelby, formerly safety vice president at aluminum manufacturer Alcoa. "I have a passion for safety and it's about caring."

Tesla disputed each of Reveal's findings. The company said that it had no information that workers were exposed to silica dust and that it does regular air monitoring. It said that while some hoists did fail and injure workers, it was not due to a lack of engineering or inspections, and they have been improved.

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Tesla officials Laurie Shelby (left) and Gaby Toledano read the concerns of then-safety lead J. White, who emailed CEO Elon Musk's chief of staff in 2016. "I know what can keep a person up at night regarding safety," she wrote. "I must tell you that I can't sleep here at Tesla." Tesla says concerns were unsubstantiated.

Credit: Paul Kuroda for Reveal

Toledano and Shelby said they had never heard of Musk's purported aesthetic preferences and pointed out that the factory does have some yellow. Both distanced themselves from what might have happened before their tenure.

Not all injured workers have given up on Tesla, either. Dennis Cruz has had his share of injuries, yet he still wants to get back to the production line.

At one point, out on workers' compensation because of work-induced tendinitis, Cruz ended up living in his car, unable to afford rent. Then, in late 2016, a **toxic** adhesive many workers complain about got in his eye, damaging his cornea. And in September, as a quality inspector, Cruz says he put out a fire that broke out on a car body, inhaling fumes from burning chemicals.

Cruz, 42, is on light duty as he struggles with shortness of breath, coughing spells and headaches. But he wants to provide for his family, apply his skills and get promoted.

“I can’t do that on workers’ comp. I can’t do that away from the factory,” he said. “That’s why I push to go back. I push to go back into the fire.”

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Discrepancies in injury counts

In Tesla’s internal injury tracking system, a supervisor wrote that a worker

couldn't come to work one day in February 2017 because "his left arm was in pain from installing Wiper motors during his shift." One worker "fainted and hit head on floor" because "team member was working in a group setting and became uncomfortably hot." Another employee, a supervisor noted, was "highly relied upon at this workstation" but injured her shoulder from repetitive motion due to an "Unfriendly Ergonomic Process."

Tesla is required by law to report every work-related injury that results in days away from work, job restrictions or medical treatment beyond first aid. But those injuries were labeled "personal medical" cases, meaning work had nothing to do with them. So they weren't counted when Tesla tallied its injuries on legally mandated reports.



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New Tesla employees learn how to use tools safely in a training session at the Fremont, Calif. factory. State safety regulators have cited Tesla eight times since 2013 for deficient training, including twice in the last year.

Credit: Paul Kuroda for Reveal

The list of the uncounted goes on. One worker had back spasms when reaching for boxes, one sprained her back carrying something to a work table and one got a pinch in his back from bending over to apply sealer and couldn't walk off the pain

couldn't walk on the pain.

By law, if something at work contributed to an injury – even if work wasn't the only cause – the injury **must be counted**.

A former Tesla safety professional, however, said the company systematically undercounted injuries by mislabeling them.

“I saw injuries on there like broken bones and lacerations that they were saying were not recordable” as injuries, said the safety professional, who asked to remain anonymous. “I saw a lot of stuff that was like, ‘Wow, this is crazy.’”

Reveal compared records from Tesla's internal tracking system, obtained from a source, with the records from the state and provided to Reveal.

For a dozen examples provided, Reveal made the decision to not count the injuries as work-related because of their descriptions. But later, Tesla said, a number of injuries not affiliated with the company – determined there was no connection to work.

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“I feel very strongly,” Shelby said. “We are doing proper recordkeeping here at Tesla.”

Reveal also provided Tesla's internal descriptions of the injuries, along with the company's case-by-case response, to Doug Parker, executive director of Worksafe, an Oakland-based organization that **previously analyzed** Tesla's official injury logs.

“The examples you've given me are concerning, troubling,” he said. “They suggest that Tesla isn't reporting all the workplace injuries that they should be reporting.”

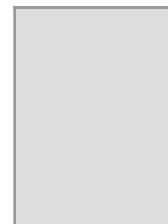
California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health has cited Tesla for more than 40 violations since 2013. Tesla's rate of serious injuries that required time off or job restrictions was **83 percent higher** than the industry in 2016. Since then, however, Tesla says it has turned things around on its way to **“becoming the safest car factory in the world.”**

Last year, Musk claimed in a **staffwide email** and at a **shareholder meeting** that the company's injury rate was much better than the industry

average. A company **blog post** said that to be average would be “to go backwards.”

Then Tesla apparently did hit reverse.

LISTEN TO THE F



...then Tesla apparently did not reverse.

“Our 2017 data showed that we are at industry average, so we’re happy about that,” Shelby said, explaining the earlier claims as a “snapshot in time.”

Musk also **emailed** his staff last year saying he was meeting weekly with the safety team and “would like to meet every injured person as soon as they are well, so that I can understand from them exactly what we need to do to make it better.”

Toledano said Musk did meet with some injured workers, but no longer meets weekly with the safety team because it isn’t necessary.

“Now I can’t claim he’s that’s absurd.”

Several former members they had other reasons

The company, for example temporary workers, they said. Tesla fills some of its factory positions with temp workers who later may be offered permanent jobs. Companies must count those injuries if they supervise the temps, as Tesla does.

“That’s the law,” agreed Tesla’s Shelby. “Based on my review of our data, we’ve always done that.”

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Laurie Shelby, Tesla's vice president for environment, health and safety, points to the principal department listed on a placard at the car plant in Fremont, Calif.

Credit: Paul Kuroda for Reveal

At one point, though, White said she asked her supervisor why the injury rate seemed off, and he told her they weren't counting temp worker injuries.

"They knew they were reporting incorrect numbers," White said. "Those workers were being injured on the floor and that wasn't being captured, and they knew that."

Tesla began to fix that problem in 2017, former employees said, but it's unclear how consistently.

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After workers requested the company's injury logs last year, Tesla **amended** its **original** 2016 report to add 135 injuries that hadn't been counted previously. The company said it changed the numbers after it discovered injuries that hadn't been shared with Tesla by its temp agencies.

Toxic workplace chemicals

In April 2017, Tarik Logan – a temporary worker – was assigned to patch

parts in Tesla’s battery packs with Henkel Loctite AA H3500. The powerful adhesive includes **toxic chemicals** that can cause **allergic reactions and even genetic defects**. Logan and a former co-worker said they went through more than 100 tubes of the glue a day without adequate ventilation or protection from the fumes.

First it brought dizziness, then headaches – the worst pain he’s ever felt, Logan said.

“He’s a strong person,” said Toni Porter, his mother. “For him to cry out, it was terrifying.”

Tesla referred Logan, then 23, to a medical clinic that diagnosed an “acute reaction to car adhesive” and prescribed painkillers and told him to rest.

“My head still hurt tho,



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These texts are among those sent by Tarik Logan to his mother, Toni Porter, while Logan worked at the Tesla factory in Fremont, California in April 2017.

He missed work and ended up at the hospital multiple times, Logan and Porter said. Then Tesla declined to take him on as a permanent employee, citing attendance issues.

Tesla, in response to Reveal's inquiries, said it doesn't agree with the doctor's determination that Logan's pain was work-related. In any case, Tesla said, it doesn't count as an injury because it didn't require any medical treatment.

By law, however, just the prescription of pain medication – documented in medical records obtained by Reveal – **requires** that his injury be counted.

Logan handled only a very small amount of the chemical and exposure levels were within standards, Tesla stated. The company also said Logan didn't complain about headaches until he told a doctor a month later.

That statement is contradicted by medical records and internal company records, which show the system and Logan was started.

The former safety team told workers that their medical problems instead

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“We have employees at work that don't know what they're being exposed to, and nobody's taking care of them,” the safety professional said. “It's heartbreaking.”

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Mark Eberley, 48, was diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome in 2014. He injured his hand welding thousands of studs to car wheelhouses during nearly 12-hour days at Tesla.

Credit: Emily Harger for Reveal

One worker is described in internal records as having gone to Tesla's nurse "expressing concerns with the fumes in the area. Saying he feels like he is dying." It was marked a personal medical issue, with a note that stated, "Beyond my skillset."

Shelby, the safety vice president, said Tesla checks thoroughly for chemical exposures and "nowhere are we over any of the exposure limits."

This year, regulators **cited** the company for failing to "effectively assess the workplace" for chemical hazards, which Tesla is appealing.

'Thrown to the wolves'

If Tesla has been improving, it wasn't fast enough for Alaa Alkhafagi, who

joined Tesla in 2017 as an engineering technician servicing robots that spray paint on car bodies. Alkhafagi said he received no safety instruction specific to the paint department.

Last fall, Alkhafagi, 27, said he was told to go underneath the painting booth to clear excess paint from a clogged hose.

Unsure of how to get down there, workers would pry up a piece of the metal flooring and jump in, he said. When he did, Alkhafagi's foot got stuck in paint, his hand slipped and he fell forward, **smashing** his head and arm. He ended up unable to make a fist or go back to his job, filing a workers' compensation claim, he said.

The incident didn't end there. Alkhafagi said it wasn't recorded because of his inability to go back to his job. He should have been counted as lost time.

"It's more than the accident that wasn't properly recorded."

Tesla said that after his injury, the company made sure only specially trained workers did that job.

Lack of adequate training was a problem throughout the factory, said Roger Croney, who oversaw workers in three different departments.

New employees with no factory experience were sent to Tesla's die-casting operation – where aluminum is melted and molded into parts – without basic training specific to the job, said Croney, former associate manager in that department. Some didn't know they'd be working with 1,200-degree molten metal.

It was far different from the General Motors plant in Ohio where Croney had worked for eight years, he said. So Croney took it upon himself to develop his own training program. A blast of liquid metal had burned his face and hands not long after he came to Tesla in 2012, and he took safety seriously. But other supervisors didn't, Croney said.

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Roger Croney oversaw workers in three different departments at Tesla. He took it upon himself to develop his own training program for new employees, whom he said were sometimes sent to work with no factory experience or basic training specific to the job.

Credit: AJ Mast for Reveal

“A lot of workers come in and they get thrown to the wolves,” he said.

Croney quit in March 2017 with a [letter](#) alleging a pattern of discriminatory treatment. Croney, who is black, said he was passed over repeatedly by white people with less experience and then demoted to a supervisor.

In a statement, Tesla said Croney didn’t mention racial discrimination in his letter or exit interview. Croney has a pending claim of racial discrimination at Tesla with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

State safety regulators have cited Tesla eight times since 2013 for deficient training, including twice in the last year, according to a Reveal review of records.

Tesla defended its training regimen, saying all new production employees get a day of orientation, a day of classroom instruction and two days of hands-on training in which they’re shown how to hold and use tools while avoiding injury. Workers building the Model 3 get an additional two days of virtual training on computers.

“Four days is pretty intensive,” Toledano said, “and then there’s ongoing

“Four days is pretty intensive, five days is crazy, and then there’s ongoing training, so training is central.”

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Repetitive stress injuries

Acknowledging that repetitive stress injuries are the most common way

workers get hurt there, Tesla officials emphasize ergonomic improvements to the new Model 3 assembly line.

“We actually redesigned it so it’s safer for our employees to make,” Shelby said. “It’s super cool to see when it’s on the line how much easier it is to make the Model 3.”

Tesla, however, wouldn’t let reporters see that assembly line.



Inside Tesla’s electric car factory in Fremont, Calif., the company is under immense pressure ramp up production of the new Model 3 sedan, its first mass-market vehicle at \$35,000.

Credit: Andrej Sokolow/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

When building Tesla’s other cars, former workers said they had to sacrifice their bodies to save time. Some workers, for example, lifted heavy car seats over their shoulders because the mechanical assists designed to ease the load were too slow, said Joel Barraza, a former production associate.

“People would carry a seat because they’d be like, ‘Oh, I gotta get this done.’ I personally carried a seat,” Barraza said. “They’re supposed to move. Move it on, move it on, keep the line going.”

White, the former safety lead, also said workers sometimes lifted seats manually, but Tesla, in a statement, said it doesn't happen.

Barraza said he was fired along with hundreds of other workers last fall. Tesla said employees were **terminated en masse** due to performance issues, though some workers have argued they were **cost-cutting layoffs** or used to **punish union supporters**.

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Mark Eberley shows his scar from surgery after carpal tunnel syndrome left him unable to work at the Tesla factory in Fremont, California. He has been out of work for years.

Credit: Emily Harger for Reveal

Barraza said he and others hurt their backs through repetitive movements, but few complained because “supervisors would be like, ‘Oh, he’s just being a little bitch.’”

Workers’ accounts from 2017 didn’t sound much different from those who were injured years earlier. In 2014, Mark Eberley was diagnosed with Tesla-induced carpal tunnel syndrome. He wrecked his hand welding thousands of studs to car wheelhouses during nearly 12-hour days, he said. He needed surgery and was out of work and on workers’ compensation for years.

“No matter what we were doing, it was hustle, hustle, hustle,” he said. “If you didn’t get your numbers, they’d be complaining to you.”

The pressure could be crushing for white-collar workers as well.

At his office job at the Fremont factory, senior analyst Ali Khan prepared Tesla’s financial filings required by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. In 2016, the office was understaffed, and he worked at least 12 hours every day, he said – no weekends, holidays or days off at all.

The pain from repetitive motion started in his wrists, radiated up his arms, then to his neck and back. He said he would have trouble holding a glass of water and couldn’t play with his 1-year-old daughter.

Khan said he asked for his manager they were

“My boss is telling me, slow us down, it’s going

Tesla eventually sent him to one of his preferred health clinics. A doctor there diagnosed him with work-related muscle strains and tendinitis, repeatedly prescribing painkillers and work restrictions, [medical records show](#).

That meant Khan had to be listed on Tesla’s injury logs. He wasn’t.

Khan said he still wasn’t allowed the doctor-ordered breaks. Forfeiting lucrative stock options, he submitted his resignation in August 2016. But his body hasn’t recovered.

“These things were preventable – that’s what makes me upset,” he said. “All of this could have been addressed, and it just wasn’t.”

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This story was edited by Ziva Branstetter and Amy Pyle and copy edited by Nadia Wynter and Nikki Frick.

Will Evans can be reached at w.evans@revealnews.org, and Alyssa Jeong Perry can be reached at alyssaperry@kqed.org or on Twitter: [@willcjr](https://twitter.com/willcjr) and [@alyssajperry](https://twitter.com/alyssajperry).

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