

Lawsuit alleges man died in a burning Tesla because its futuristic doors wouldn't open

By Theman Taylor, J.D. Candidate 2022 | November 6, 2019

Elon Musk founded Tesla Motors in 2003 and oversees all product development, engineering, and design of the world-renowned company. In August of 2008, Tesla announced its first electric sedan called the Model S. Elon Musk is known for having a brilliant mind and was quoted saying, "If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough." Recently, a failure related to Tesla has come tragically according to Omar Awan's attorney, Stuart Grossman. Grossman filed suit against Tesla claiming the company was at fault for his client's death in a car crash due to the Model S's futuristic design features.

Omar Awan was a 48-year-old anesthesiologist and a father to five children. Like many Americans, he leased the Tesla Model S because he was environmentally sensitive and conscious of safety. According to a Tesla spokeswoman who responded after the crash, "Tesla vehicles are engineered to be the safest cars in the world and Tesla drivers have driven more than 10 billion miles to date." Awan was driving the Model S and lost control. The car went across a South Florida road and ultimately slammed into a palm tree. The struggle for his life began shortly afterwards. Once the car was stopped, the Tesla lithium-ion battery caught fire while smoke and flames filled the car. There was a crowd standing nearby to witness the tragedy take place but there was nothing anyone could do to help. According to the Washington Post, "the car's retractable door handles, which are supposed to auto-present when they detect a key fob nearby, malfunctioned and first responders weren't able to open the doors and save Awan." Grossman alleges there was no other way to open the doors because of the Model S's inaccessible door handles.

Awan's death is not the only Tesla-related failure in the news recently. Another lawsuit from a May 2018 crash that killed two teens was a result of the lithium battery catching on fire. Also, a Shanghai parking garage surveillance footage showed a Model S moments before the car burst into flames after smoke was resonating. Tesla has responded to the lawsuits and other claims of the company's cars resulting in accidents by saying, "high-speed crashes can result in fires whether the car is powered by gasoline or batteries." Grossman responded to this by saying this was not the issue in his client's case because all the first responders needed to do to save his life was have access to the Model S door handles.

Dr. Awan leaves behind a family and an issue to be solved by Tesla. Even after the crash, and after firefighters extinguished the flames, the Model S reignited and began burning at a local tow yard. Tesla is one of the world's most innovative companies we have, but tragic stories like these are eye-opening. The American people are brought back to the reality of just how safe we must be with technology and automobiles.

