

Are EVs Too Quiet? NHTSA Investigates the Safety Risks



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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is investigating whether older models without pedestrian warning sounds could be dangerous.

Misconceptions about electric vehicles are plentiful. Some believe they are more harmful to the environment than internal combustion engine (ICE) cars, while others argue that they lack power and cannot accommodate the needs of a typical driver. Nevertheless, these claims are baseless; however, how safe are EVs? The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is taking into account pedestrian safety when assessing electric vehicles - this is a legitimate issue worth considering.



At low speeds, pedestrians, bicyclists, and others near the road mostly hear only the sound of the engine, not the sound of the tires on the pavement. While cars are loud, we don't hear only the engine sound at low speeds. But EVs are quiet – so noiseless, in fact, that a recent law mandates that new EVs and hybrids must come with a pedestrian warning sound onboard. Can older EVs be considered safer for pedestrians than others?

A hybrid car is 19% more likely to strike a pedestrian than a conventional gasoline car, and the risk is even higher for blind and visually impaired people. As a result of the new warning sound rule, NHTSA estimated that pedestrian and cyclist injuries would be reduced by more than 2,300 incidents at the time it implemented the rule.

It appears sensible to consider a similar rule for older EVs, then. NHTSA started looking into it following the July 2022 petition of an individual lobbying for this new requirement. They declared that it's not right to have different standards for earlier

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hybrid cars and EVs than vehicles built in the future. The findings of this study could result in older EVs having to install a noise-making device as part of a retrofit.

Such a ruling has been preceded. Honda and other automakers were forced to recall airbags between 2008 and 2011 due to faulty airbags made by Takata. The recall affected almost 70 million airbags, but not all have been repaired.

Besides setting a precedent, this tale also illustrates just how difficult it could be to track down the more than nine million older hybrids and electric vehicles that might be subject to retrofit rules. The investigation by NHTSA continues. It is undoubtedly challenging, but it may be able to save lives.