

# How Cruise is Reinventing Safety Standards



By Tony Rached

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In the ever-evolving landscape of autonomous vehicle technology, trust and safety remain paramount. Amidst this backdrop, GM's Cruise has taken a significant step by appointing Steve Kenner, a seasoned safety expert with an impressive pedigree spanning the automotive and technology sectors, as its new Chief Safety Officer. This move comes at a critical juncture, following a mishap that put Cruise under scrutiny and highlighted the complex challenges of navigating the future of self-driving cars. In this article, we'll delve into why this appointment is a pivotal moment for Cruise and the autonomous vehicle industry at large, and how it aims to rebuild trust and pave a safer path forward.



### The Strategic Hire

Earning Back Trust is Job One

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# Appraiser Blog

Cruise, General Motors' autonomous vehicle division, finds itself at a crossroads following an incident that raised eyebrows about the safety of robotaxis. In a bold move to steer the company towards safer shores, Cruise announced the hiring of Steve Kenner as its Chief Safety Officer. Kenner brings to the table a wealth of experience, with nearly four decades of leadership in safety roles across notable companies including Ford, Apple, and most recently, Kodiak, a self-driving truck company.

## A Seasoned Safety Veteran

Kenner's career trajectory is noteworthy:

- **Early Years:** Began as an engineer at General Motors, marking a full-circle return to his roots.
- **Leadership Roles:** Served as Global Safety Director at Ford, and held significant positions at tech giants Apple and Uber, as well as Aurora, a key player in autonomous truck technology.

His diverse background across both automotive and technology companies positions him uniquely to address the multifaceted challenges of autonomous vehicle safety.

## A Pivotal Time for Cruise

Kenner's arrival comes in the wake of a troubling incident involving a Cruise robotaxi in San Francisco, which not only resulted in physical harm but also cast a shadow over the company's operational transparency and safety protocols. The sequence of events unfolded as follows:

- **The Incident:** A Cruise robotaxi, after being hit by a human-driven vehicle, dragged a pedestrian across a distance, leading to serious safety concerns.
- **Regulatory Response:** The California Public Utilities Commission's decision to suspend Cruise's license highlighted the need for stringent safety measures and transparent communication with regulators.

This episode served as a wake-up call, leading to significant leadership changes and a reassessment of GM's ambitions in the autonomous driving space.

## Fostering Safety Through Collaboration

Kenner champions the idea that true safety in autonomous vehicle technology is achieved through teamwork and open dialogue, highlighting the crucial role of working in tandem with regulatory authorities. His strategy is anchored in two key pillars:

- **Engaging with Regulators:** Kenner is set on establishing a solid foundation of trust with oversight agencies, aiming to go beyond basic compliance by setting new benchmarks for safety excellence.
- **Cultivating a Safety-First Mindset:** He plans to infuse a holistic culture of safety within the organization, ensuring that every facet of Cruise's operations is aligned with the paramount objective of safeguarding passengers and all users of public roadways.

## Conclusion

Steve Kenner stepping into the role of Chief Safety Officer at Cruise signals a transformative era focused on redefining safety standards within the autonomous vehicle sphere. With his unparalleled blend of expertise and a visionary approach to both technology and regulatory collaboration, Kenner is poised to lead Cruise through the complexities of today's safety challenges. This strategic move underscores Cruise's dedication to not just overcoming past hurdles but also pioneering advancements in safe, autonomous mobility. As the industry progresses, the direction set by Kenner will be pivotal in ensuring Cruise's leadership in the development of autonomous vehicles that are not only innovative but also trusted and reliable on a global scale.