

California to allow autonomous cars without driver

SAN FRANCISCO, US: California officials have unveiled new regulations that would allow autonomous vehicles to operate on state roads in test projects without a human operator.



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A revised regulation which could take effect in 2018 would eliminate a provision in an earlier draft that required "physical control by a natural person sitting in the vehicle's driver's seat" in any autonomous car.

The language was replaced with a requirement for "supervising the autonomous technology's performance of the dynamic driving task."

The California Department of Motor Vehicles said in the statement the change was made to remove a requirement which "could be unnecessarily limiting on the development of the technology" and to provide flexibility to allow remote monitoring.



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The new rules come with a growing number of tech firms and automakers testing self-driving vehicles and follow new guidelines from the federal government aimed at spurring the technology widely believed to improve road safety and reduce accidents.

"We are excited to take the next step in furthering the development of this potentially life-saving technology in California," said state Transportation Secretary Brian Kelly.

DMV director Jean Shiomoto said the agency hopes to finalize its regulations by the end of the year and noted that 42 companies have permits to test autonomous vehicles in the states.

"The department looks forward to seeing those companies and additional companies advance the technology under these new regulations," Shiomoto said.



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But John Simpson of the activist group Consumer Watchdog said the proposed rule would allow tech and auto firms to "do whatever they want as they use our roads as private laboratories and threaten highway safety."

The state agency said any autonomous vehicles would need to meet federal safety standards.

But Simpson said that in the absence of strict federal regulations which apply specifically to autonomous cars, "it's imperative that California continues to protect us."

Source: AFP

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