AI and Safety – Failure Modes of Automated Systems Fatality File

A Tesla factory robot reportedly attacked a worker and left them bleeding. This could become a new reality in the increasingly automated workplace

A robot attacked a Tesla worker and left them bleeding on the automaker's Austin factory floor two years ago, according to an explosive new report. It was one of a series of incidents at Giga Texas, a sprawling Austin factory that is key to Tesla's goal of building a sub-$25,000 electric car.

The series of injuries reported by tech news outlet The Information offers a rare look into an oft-hidden part of the U.S. workplace—and a warning of what the future could look like as manufacturing becomes more and more automated.

At Giga Texas, an engineer had started to work on three robots sometime in 2021 but didn't realize that only two had been shut off, The Information reported, citing two unnamed witnesses. The third robot kept moving and "pinned the engineer against a surface, pushing its claws into his body and drawing blood from his back and his arm," the outlet said. After another worker hit an emergency stop button, the victim was able to get out of the robot's grasp and fell down a scrap-metal chute, trailing blood behind him, The Information said. (Tesla did not respond to a request for comment from Fortune on the incident.)

It's unclear if there was any federal response to the incident, although Tesla submitted an injury report to the county about a

worker receiving a “laceration, cut or open wound” from a robot. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a division of the Labor Department that is responsible for workplace safety, inspected Tesla’s Austin factory just once a year in 2021 and 2022, most recently after a workers’ center filed a complaint about a subcontracted worker who suffered a heat-related injury while in the Tesla factory, according to The Information. In contrast, Tesla’s Fremont, Calif., factory received nine safety inspections each year in 2021 and 2022, and four so far in 2023, the outlet reported.

Source: https://fortune.com