



TxDOT Is Unmoved by Claims a Dallas Company's Guardrails Are Maiming Drivers

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Guardrails are supposed to save you from your own poor driving, but may sometimes kill you instead.

Since 1999, the guardrails manufactured by Dallas' Trinity Industries have been credited with saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of drivers across the country. Trinity's popular older guardrail design, called the ET-2000, is supposed to roll back when struck by cars, absorbing some of the impact and lowering the risk that the people inside the car will get seriously hurt or die.

But in 2005, Trinity Industries altered the design of its guardrail model, shaving off about an inch of metal on each guardrail. It was a minor change, the company has claimed, and one it said wasn't implemented to cut costs, even though a *20/20* news investigation this month [uncovered emails from Trinity's own engineers](#) calculating that the change would save the company \$2 per each guardrail.

Whatever the reason for the change, the results look gruesome. The newer guardrail model, called the ET-Plus, sometimes reacts to a car crash not by rolling back like its supposed to, but instead by slicing through the car and impaling the people inside.

Elisa Gonzales is one of the people who was impaled. She was a passenger in a car that was driving north on Interstate 35 to Gainesville in 2011 when her driver fell asleep. The car struck the ET-Plus guardrail, which sliced through the car directly to the passenger side, amputating Gonzales' leg, she said in a lawsuit she filed in Dallas against Trinity Industries last year.

The lawsuits alleging that Trinity Industries' guardrail design is defective have been popping up across the country, and there's now some research to support the plaintiffs' claims. According to engineers at the University of Alabama, [an eight-year analysis of crash data](#) they published last week shows that the ET-Plus model guardrail is 2.86 times more likely to kill people than the earlier ET-2000 design. The newer design is also 1.36 times more likely to cause serious injuries, the report says.

Shortly after that study was published, state transportation agencies in Massachusetts and Missouri said they would no longer use the guardrails on current or future construction projects. That followed an announcement made by Nevada officials in May saying they would also take the ET-Plus guardrails off new projects.

But here in the guardrails' home state, don't expect major changes anytime soon. A Texas Department of Transportation spokesman tells us in an email statement that they're sticking with the wait-and-see approach:

The ET-Plus remains an approved product per the Federal Highway Administration; accordingly TxDOT will continue to allow its use at this time. We are monitoring the performance of these end treatments and currently have no conclusive data to establish they are creating a safety hazard to the driving public. We will continue to stay in contact with all our state and federal partners to gauge if further action is warranted.

Texas A&M's Texas Transportation Institute is also named in the lawsuits against Trinity Industries for approving the guardrails in 2005 safety tests. In response to the allegations that its been maiming people, Trinity Industries has touted its connection to the university. "Trinity has a high degree of confidence in the performance and integrity of the ET-Plus® System, which we are proud to manufacture and sell under license from Texas A&M University," the company [said in a statement](#) last month in response to lawsuits filed by product safety groups and a former employee-turned-whistle-blower.



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