

CO-Gas Safety Unintentional Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Case Study

TONY DYMOTT, Survived in 1976



Age: 23

Fuel: Petrol

Appliance & Location: Police van used at work

Notes by CO-Gas Safety: This incident would most likely not happen today, due to changes in vehicle technology and Police working practices, but it shows the danger posed by petrol exhaust emissions, even when not in an enclosed space.

Tony Dymott

Traffic cones needed outside Bristol City football ground

In 1976 I was a Police Constable in the Avon and Somerset Constabulary, working from Bishopsworth Station. On our patch was the Bristol City football ground. Prior to each match around 150 parking cones had to be put down to try and prevent the often daft parking that occurred as people rushed to the ground.

I put the cones down and collected them up

The cones were put down using a van with one PC driving and the other crouching down by the open side door. As the van crawled along each cone was dropped into the gutter. The cones were heavy, weighted down with sausage-shaped bags of sand inside the base, and putting down a large number would be a time-consuming and physical job by any other method at the time. I had no interest in football so this was a job I was quite happy to do. Once the match had started, we would then repeat our journey, picking up the cones and stacking them back in the van.

I suddenly fell out of the vehicle

On one occasion, I was carrying out the task of collecting the cones into the side of the van, and I suddenly fell out of the vehicle. Apparently, the last thing I said was “Hang on I’ve missed one”.

When the driver realised something was wrong, he went round the van to the pavement and found me on the floor having convulsions. I recollect only a sea of faces, including two ambulance men looking down on me, and managed to miss the blue light and two tones high speed dash to the hospital escorted by two police motorcyclists. I woke again briefly in A & E and then spent the night in hospital before being discharged in the morning.

Carbon monoxide was likely to have been a major factor

It was concluded that it was likely that carbon monoxide was a major factor, as the exhaust pipe exited below the side door over which I had been crouched. Another factor was my crouching down, affecting the blood flow, and a lack of food and sleep were possibly contributory. I was asked if I intended taking any action but having no long-term effects I declined.

Because of the convulsions I was sent for an EEG to determine if I was epileptic. I have no recollection of the treatment, if any, that I was given at the time.

Outlet of exhaust changed to the back of the vehicle

The vehicle in question was almost certainly petrol, without a catalytic converter. The only change made was to move the outlet of the exhaust to the back of the van. The method of putting cones out was continued. Of course we now have improved attitudes to health and safety; carrying a passenger not in a proper seat and not restrained would no longer be allowed.