

## CO-Gas Safety Unintentional Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Case Study

### PAULINE CROXALL, Deceased in 2012



*Pauline Croxall with her sister*

**Age:** 72

**Fuel:** Diesel

**Appliance & Location:** Generator in the porch of her mobile home

**Notes by CO-Gas Safety:** This account was transcribed by Stephanie Trotter on 13.12.18 from Pauline's sister, Karen Barlow. It appeared in our 2018 press pack and shows that CO alarms are only effective if we realise why they activate and what appliances, fuels and conditions can produce a build up of carbon monoxide.

Pauline lived in a 50 foot by 10 foot caravan/mobile home. This was in a large field. Pauline wanted to stay there with her cattle who were calving. She added a large porch on the side. She could only walk with sticks but got help from her nephew when she needed it for the cattle.

#### **Usual power supply replaced with other arrangements**

She had a big diesel-powered generator outside for electricity. She had been told it would cost £30,000 to put the mains electric into her caravan. The generator broke down and the estimate was £2,500 to repair it. Pauline therefore bought a small generator (also diesel) which she put in the porch. This ran for four hours before she had to top it up. She also had a new multi-fuel fire put in her lounge a couple of months before she died. The people who installed the fire left a CO alarm from British Gas Honeywell. This used to go off when the little generator was on. When she had the little generator on in the porch, she left the back door of the porch open so the fumes could escape.

#### **Carbon monoxide alarm sounded regularly**

Her sister Karen used to take Pauline shopping on a Saturday but often Pauline wasn't well enough to go. On the occasions when she just had to go shopping, she would often feel much better after about ten minutes in the car. Karen kept telling Pauline that she thought it was the generator making Pauline ill, but Pauline refused to take any notice although the CO alarm kept going off. Pauline thought the alarm was faulty because the alarm had come with the fire, so she never thought that the alarm was sounding because the generator was emitting CO.

Pauline got so fed up with the alarm going off that she put it on the dustbin outside. However, it was quite near the little generator so would carry on alarming. Karen knew nothing about this. Eventually Pauline put the alarm in her bedroom under a pillow where it was well away from the generator and so stopped making a sound.

#### **Education and awareness of CO are essential**

Pauline just didn't know enough about carbon monoxide to realise that the alarm should be taken notice of. Karen didn't know that the CO alarm had been sounding but that Pauline had ignored it. Pauline's nephew knew that the CO alarm had been sounding but didn't realise the significance. If only Pauline or her nephew had known how quickly CO can kill, then Pauline would still be alive.

When it was really cold Pauline slept in the lounge. She had sealed off all the air vents. That is where Pauline was found dead. The investigator found it was the little generator that had poisoned her, not the fire.

After her death one of the family members found someone willing to mend the big generator outside for only £25.