

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

### COLIN & FAMILY, Survived in 2020



*Colin the dog*

**Fuel:** Solid fuel

**Appliance & Location:** Open fire in his own home

**Notes by CO-Gas Safety:** The human family of Colin the dog are friends of CO-Gas Safety's President & Director, Stephanie Trotter. As a result they were aware that CO is produced by all carbon-based fuels when they burn, not just mains gas, and have had carbon monoxide alarms fitted in their home that ensured this incident did not end in tragedy.

We have two fireplaces in our home and enjoy open log and coal fires frequently in both. They are swept reasonably frequently; once every year/two years. We know Stephanie Trotter, OBE, the President & Director of CO-Gas Safety. Encouraged by her, a few years ago we set up CO alarms to EN 50291 by the central heating boiler, the gas hob and next to both open fireplaces. These are regularly checked by professionals.

#### **The night of our incident**

On a Friday evening in February, we lit one of the fires with kindling and logs and noticed that it was billowing smoke. We let it run for a while, but opened the French windows. Our dog Colin went straight out of the door and lay down at the bottom of the garden; the first time that had he behaved this way in 12 years. I felt very faint, so sat down. Simon went outside to see what Colin was doing.

Then after 5 minutes the CO alarm sounded, but we thought it was a smoke problem initially. I fainted. My husband was not so affected, possibly because he is tall. We let the fire go out, which didn't take long as it was not banked up, and encouraged Colin to come back in. Colin took some persuading; he was obviously wary. I felt very groggy so went to bed and slept fitfully for 12 hours.

#### **Continued effects of the exposure**

Both Colin the dog and I vomited the next morning, (an alarming yellow). I had developed a headache straight away and it was still there the next morning. I generally felt sick, faint and dizzy for the next 24 hours. Simon was not affected and had absolutely no symptoms.

We have used two sweeps in the past but I can't remember which one had swept the chimney last. It would have been about a year before, maybe 18 months. We use the fireplaces every day from September to about May/June, so are very regular with the Sweep and chimney maintenance.

We called the sweep – and decided to go with a recommendation, Brian Wakefield, who is a Member of the Guild of Master Sweeps and runs IPS - Island Power (Chimney) Sweeping on Isle of Wight. He came very promptly and swept the chimney. He found a brush up the chimney. This had become tarred over time and completely blocked the chimney, creating the huge smoke problem and forcing CO emissions back into the house. It must have been the last sweep who swept who left the brush there, as Brian found the brush as soon as he put his own brushes up.

People think just of CO emissions from boilers, but this was an open fire, burning wood. Luckily, we are all fine, thanks to having the well-maintained CO alarm, and the alert behaviour of Colin.

*Colin's owner*