

CO-Gas Safety Unintentional Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Case Study

KELLY WEBSTER & LAUREN THORNTON, Deceased in 2013



Ages: 36 & 10

Fuel: Petrol

Appliance & Location: Portable generator used on board a boat

Notes by CO-Gas Safety: This case study was written by Kelly's sister, Tracy, and was published in the 2018 press pack. CO-Gas Safety are very grateful to Tracy for her support. CO poisoning on board boats continues to be an underrated risk, with a further 9 deaths on boats having been recorded by us since this tragedy at time of writing. Petrol is often not associated with carbon monoxide but any combustible fuel can produce CO, in any location.

Kelly Webster & Lauren Thornton

During the Easter weekend on April 1 2013, we were told the news my beautiful sister Kelly Webster and my beautiful niece Lauren Thornton had been found dead in the sleeping compartment on board a boat belonging to Kelly's partner, Matthew Eteson.

Fatal modification to an appliance

The cause of death was poisoning by carbon monoxide, from the exhaust system of a generator which Matthew Eteson had installed on board. Matthew was a registered and experienced Gas Safe installer. Shortly before the Easter weekend he fabricated an exhaust system for the generator and used the generator to power a fan heater in the passenger quarters while Kelly, Lauren and he himself slept.

The exhaust system was poorly designed and poorly constructed, using unsuitable materials. The generator was not secured or anchored to the floor and joints in the exhaust pipework were very poorly fabricated. The temperatures generated caused the pipework to fail as soft soldered joints melted, and as a result the exhaust gases containing carbon monoxide were discharged into the boat. At a trial in October 2015, Mr Eteson pleaded not guilty to manslaughter by gross negligence, but was found guilty.

In November that year he was handed a two-year suspended sentence. It's been horrendous, our family will never be the same again. The world will never be the same without Kelly & Lauren.

Commemorating by fundraising

On March 2016 Kelly would have turned 40, so I decided to hold a charity ball for friends and family to turn this into a happier occasion. Kelly loved a party – I couldn't let her 40th birthday pass without doing something for my beautiful sister & niece.

I approached Stephanie Trotter, President & Director of CO-Gas Safety, and explained I would like to raise funds for this charity. Stephanie was delighted to help & support me in any way possible.

Stephanie advised that since the death of Kelly and Lauren they had put a course about CO together which they've taught to apprentices from Scotia Gas Networks and Northern Gas Networks. This then went on to win the H & V Safety Initiative of the Year 2017.

We held an auction and raffle as a lot of local business kindly donated prizes for this great event.

Sadly Stephanie from the charity had already booked a holiday abroad so could not be there but she asked Sue Westwood, a CO victim and a trustee of CO-Gas Safety, to represent the charity. Sue enjoyed the evening very much indeed.

The ball was a fitting memorial to the lives of mother & daughter. The ball raised just over £2,000 for CO-Gas Safety charity. There was a lot of mixed emotions on the day. During the night there was large photographs of Kelly and Lauren on display, a memory book for guests to fill in, a DJ and a jazz singer played Kelly's favourite songs.

The ball was held at the Hallmark Hotel in Leyland, Lancashire.

Tracy Arya



Tracy Arya, Kelly's sister and Lauren's Aunt, with her friends at the ball

CO-Gas Safety comment

CO can be expected in the most unexpected situations and even when you think it would not be a risk. We already knew from Matthew Nixon's death in 2010 that registered gas installers were not taught enough about CO from fuels other than gas – Matthew was a Gas Safe registered installer who was killed as a result of using a petrol generator to power his tools while working on a heating system in a vacant flat.

As a result, CO-Gas Safety had already started working on a new training course for gas professionals with the help and expertise of Roland Johns, a retired investigator and trainer for British Gas. Please see <https://www.co-gassafety.co.uk/information/trainers-of-gas-installers/>. However, when the course was taught for the first time there was a feeling that the pupils, all apprentices for Scotia Gas Networks (who operate 2 of the 8 Gas Distribution Networks that cover Great Britain), thought that Matthew's death was a one-off. Kelly and Lauren's deaths certainly put a stop to that impression, since Matthew Eteson was also Gas Safe registered.

We continue to press for the training of apprentices, First Call Operators and Registered Gas Installers to be greatly improved.