

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

### **NAILA MANSOUR, Survived in 2020**



**Age:** 35

**Fuel:** Mains gas

**Appliance & Location:** Central heating boiler in her rented home

**Notes by CO-Gas Safety:** In August 2020 Naila contacted Stephanie Trotter, President & Director of CO-Gas Safety. She had found the charity by searching online for any type of information for those unintentionally exposed to CO. Naila and her young family suffered a leak from their boiler while also confined by the 2020 Covid lockdown.

*Naila Mansour and David*

I contacted CO-Gas Safety after a carbon monoxide incident that, I believe, we survived by chance.

#### **Our daily lives**

Allow me to introduce myself and my partner: we live in Notting Hill, in a gorgeous neighbourhood (on a street called Strathmore Gardens, famous for its beautiful Cherry trees). I am an actress and producer (I own my company called Ninaa Ltd: [www.ninaaco.com](http://www.ninaaco.com) and I mostly work from home). David is a film director and digital artist who also mostly works from home ([www.davidktom.com](http://www.davidktom.com) and [www.abadgeoffriendship.com/david-tomaszewski](http://www.abadgeoffriendship.com/david-tomaszewski)). Our home is a privately-rented flat.

Dorian is our gorgeous son, who was 5 years old at the time. He goes to school nearby.

#### **Fault with our boiler**

We had a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm in our flat that was outdated by more than a year. When it alarmed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2020, it didn't show an emergency leak display or a red light, but just an orange light. It made a sound, but just the fault noise. I am not sure if it was to EN 50291 or not.

My instincts pushed me to call the National Gas Emergency Service number, nevertheless, and when they came in, they cut all the gas as they believed they found some CO. However, they don't have equipment to actually test gas appliances for CO, which I cannot understand.

On the next day, the landlord sent his maintenance man, from *Masterfix*, and they found indeed that after 15 minutes of being on, the boiler in our bedroom emitted CO and that the numbers were going "over the roof".

#### **Relief and anxiety – such a narrow escape**

Awful thoughts rushed through my head, mainly one: Dorian, our 5-year-old, could have found us (his parents) and his unborn sister (I was pregnant) asleep forever in our bed. I also remembered a fainting episode that Dorian had one morning in our bedroom, and wondered if it was possibly linked.

We were lucky I called the Gas Emergency Service during the night, despite my partner David reassuring me that the alarm was "just ringing on the orange light, so it was nothing", or we may have gone to sleep and never woken up.

I cannot stress enough how this event, in the middle of lockdown, has put us through a lot of fear and discomfort. It was terrible to be in lockdown and not feel safe in our home.

### **Taking action after the discovery**

I called my midwife and asked her if I should get tested for poisoning, as I was worried for the baby I was carrying. But she said that by the time I got to the hospital, the gas might've faded away and numbers would not be accurate. It was tricky.

Myself, David and Dorian immediately went to a friend's hotel nearby, and stayed there for a week, until our landlord could guarantee fixing this boiler.

That is when I contacted Stephanie Trotter, after searching on the internet for advice about this matter that I knew very little of, except for the terrible lethal incidents we sometimes read about.

Our landlord was very sorry, and he sent an engineer about 3 times, then ended up sending another one. We do have a good landlord, I must say.

Had I not had Stephanie or a chat with her lawyer, I would not have known exactly what to claim, how to claim it and what to check (e.g. what certificates the engineer should hold etc.) in order to truly assess and fix this. In the end we didn't claim.

### **Ongoing distress**

Two years later, even though they showed me the default pipe and the new one they changed, when I hear that boiler go off, I feel anxious. I will be honest with you, I turn it off most of the time when I am in the room.

I hate our bedroom since that day; I wish our landlord would just completely change that boiler and put a modern/electric one in or displace it from the room - something more extreme than just changing a little pipe/rubber.

When I asked the engineer why they didn't just put in a brand new boiler, that is modern, that works differently, he couldn't help chuckle and replied "Madam, that is not the same cost for the landlord".

We paid £550 per week for this lovely flat, but it seems our lives aren't worth a lot more than a little rubber on a pipe. It is the world we live in.

Because of lockdown, we weren't able to visit any flats and possibly move. My second child is nearly two now, but it still terrifies me to know that boiler is in the bedroom she may be sleeping in if she joins us for the night as small children sometimes need to do. So when she wakes up or when Dorian (who is now 7) does, I will always get up immediately so we don't need to stay in the room.

We just learned to live around the "boiler's sounds". Dorian knows that if the boiler is making a sound (if it is on, if it's heating), he has to leave the room. The children just know and we've adapted our lives around it. We, as a couple, live with the bedroom window open, be it winter or summer.

### **Support and information is vital**

I would like to add a more personal note: I have been in therapy (through zoom) since this incident occurred, because it has triggered what I feel is close to a depression. Fearing for our lives, but mostly for Dorian finding us lifeless, has been a true shock for me. In the middle of lockdown too, it was just too much.

I cannot thank Stephanie enough for being there daily on the phone and by email. She was an angel sent to me. Her work is not only important but absolutely necessary. Change needs to happen. The safety of tenants should be as much a priority as their finances and the rent they owe the landlords. It is the bare minimum any human being deserves.

*Naila Mansour*