

CO-Gas Safety Unintentional Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Case Study

FRED JACKSON, Deceased in 2008



Age: 52

Fuel: Mains gas

Appliance & Location: Central heating boiler in a hotel

Notes by CO-Gas Safety: Fred's daughter, Emma, has written this case study for us, for which we are very grateful. It is a reminder that carbon monoxide poisoning can often be mistaken for common viruses, such as flu or Covid-19. If Fred had taken a portable CO alarm with him on his business trip then he may have survived. Two contractors responsible for designing and fitting the flue of the hotel boiler near Fred's hotel window were found guilty of breaching gas safety regulations and sentenced to fines.

Emma with her father, Fred

My father's name is Fred Jackson and he lived in Llanelli. He was 52 when he died of carbon monoxide poisoning in a hotel in Newquay, Cornwall.

My father was a larger-than-life man who seemed immune to health complaints; he hadn't visited a doctor in 8 years.

Symptoms seemed minor

He had gone on a business trip and mistook the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning for the symptoms of flu. He told his colleagues he was feeling unwell when they phoned his hotel room. He apologised for being late to meet them, but reassured them that he would be along shortly.

Unfortunately, he was overcome by the fumes from a loose flue pipe that had been positioned outside his bathroom window. With the window open, the effects of CO were exacerbated by the steam from the shower he had switched on in his bid to get ready.

Positioning of flue was to blame

When the flue was installed at the hotel, the bathroom window was sealed shut in a bid to prevent fumes entering the room. Even this was clearly an inadequate measure but the situation became lethal when the hotel had their windows replaced and were unaware of the danger then posed by a window that opened.

Two men responsible for the installation and positioning of the flue were fined for breaching gas safety regulations following two trials into my father's death. The press followed the case and we hope that it raised some awareness both among the public and with gas installers.

Dad never suspected his symptoms to be caused by carbon monoxide. Why would he? We would all assume that we're safe in a hotel room in which there are minimum standards which have to be met. This is why awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning, as well as extra precautions when going on a trip away, even for a night, are so crucial.

Easy precautions can save lives

Fitting carbon monoxide alarms in homes, offices, hotels and any other buildings should be as standard as having smoke alarms.

Now, I never go on holiday without taking a carbon monoxide alarm with me, and I'd urge everyone who plans to go on holiday this year to take an alarm so that they do not have to share a similar loss of a loved one.

Many CO alarms sold in the UK are portable, which means you can simply pop them into your luggage and take them with you. I urge everyone to do so and to get the alarm out of the box and pull the tab to connect it to the battery. You also need to check that the alarm is in date and complies with the European standard known as EN 50291. Buy your alarm from a reputable supplier, not from a cheap internet site, and make sure that it makes a sound to alert you if CO is detected (a purely visual alert like a flashing light or change of colour won't wake you to save you!).

At home, please make sure you have your carbon-fuelled appliances regularly maintained according to manufacturers' instructions by properly qualified people (with gas they must be Gas Safe Registered - www.gassaferegister.co.uk). Chimneys/flues must be swept at least annually and checked by a sweep belonging to a recognised trade body.

Symptoms of CO poisoning we should all know

There needs to be greater awareness of the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning. The six main symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are:

- headaches
- dizziness
- nausea
- breathlessness
- collapse
- loss of consciousness.

A key indication that carbon monoxide poisoning may be the cause is if symptoms disappear or get better when you leave the room and come back when you return.

Legacy of my father's death

As a family, we want to create awareness, protect people and do something positive to prevent more needless deaths. Our main message is to get a carbon monoxide alarm to EN 50291 today and tell your friends and family to do the same.

Emma Jackson-Phillips

CO-Gas Safety comment



Emma was only 18 years old when her father passed away. In addition to writing this case study for us, she has also undertaken several challenges in memory of her father and kindly used those occasions to raise awareness and support the charity.

www.co-gassafety.co.uk/emma-jackson-phillips-runs-the-snowdonia-marathan-in-memory-of-her-father-fred-jackson-who-died-of-co/

CO poisoning can easily be prevented with improved industry practice and greater awareness within the trades, government and among the public. People need to be aware of the dangers, how to prevent them and buy a CO alarm to EN 50291 from a reputable seller.

See www.which.co.uk/news/article/killer-carbon-monoxide-alarms-still-on-sale-through-online-marketplaces-awai88X3LNnt for warnings of poor quality alarms found online by Which?

Please remember that CO alarms, even those made to EN 50291, will stop death or serious injury but are NOT health monitors. They will not sound an alarm until they have sensed 30 parts per million of CO for 2 hours, despite WHO guidelines being set at less than 4 PPM of CO for 24 hours.