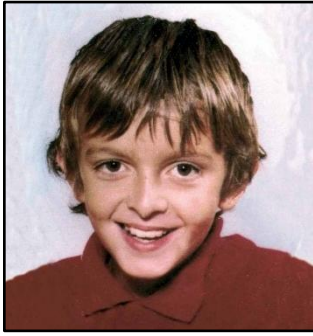


CO-Gas Safety Unintentional Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Case Study

DOMINIC RODGERS, Deceased in 2004



Dominic Rodgers

Age: 10

Fuel: Mains gas

Appliance & Location: Central heating boiler in neighbour's home

Notes by CO-Gas Safety: This case study highlights the fact that CO can be a risk even when our own appliances are safe. The toxic fumes that caused Dominic's death came from a neighbouring property, via an outside passageway. His mother benefitted from the support of CO-Gas Safety and since her loss has also done a huge amount of work raising awareness through the Dominic Rodgers Trust.

Dominic was a happy child; a keen footballer and passionate Manchester United Fan, who also loved other sports and playing on his Playstation.

Dom's mum, Stacey Rodgers, had put him to bed in his bedroom as usual and they'd said goodnight. She told him she loved him and he told her he loved her back.

The next morning when she woke up, Stacey realised that something was wrong because Dominic usually got up before her and it was so quiet. When she went into his bedroom to check, he was cold. Stacey called an ambulance and her mum.

Paramedics gave the devastating news

The paramedics arrived quickly but then gave Stacey the tragic news that Dominic, her only child and centre of her life, was dead. Stacey said, 'I was so horrified and shocked. I couldn't take it in to start with. Dominic and I had been really enjoying life.'

Stacey later learned that Dominic's blood had been tested and that he'd died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Information came slowly

The source of the toxic emissions was found to be from the gas boiler next door. It emerged that the products of combustion from the boiler had been discharged outside into a covered passageway between the properties and then rose up into Dominic's bedroom. The tenant who lived next door, in the house containing the boiler responsible for the carbon monoxide accumulation, had only been in the house for six weeks at the time of the incident. She had children of her own that had been unaffected by the fumes.

Stacey couldn't return home. She never returned to that house, not even to retrieve furniture. Stacey remembers, 'I couldn't talk to my neighbour because she didn't speak English well.'

After Dominic's death Stacey was contacted by many people, HSE, CORGI, the Local Authority, British Gas, Transco, the gas emergency service and even her local MP Barry Sheerman, who at the time of writing this case study was a co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group. Stacey recalled, 'Everyone offered sympathy, but nobody offered medical treatment, practical advice or counselling. I was feeling terrible, confused as well as grieving. I didn't know what would happen. I'd heard that there would be an inquest, but I didn't know what this meant really but I was dreading it. Nobody had even discussed this.'

CO-Gas Safety

The independent, registered charity CO-Gas Safety collects data of deaths and injury from carbon monoxide in order to study the facts and try to find ways those tragedies could have been

prevented. The charity also offers free and confidential victim support. From the data and from victims, the charity then make suggestions to industry and government to prevent future tragedies.

Stephanie Trotter, who has run the charity as a volunteer since 1995, read about Stacey and Dominic in the newspaper and tried to contact Stacey. Stacey takes up what happened next: 'It wasn't easy for Stephanie to contact me as I was being shielded from the press. However, Stephanie was determined to offer me her help. Being a barrister, she knew I'd need help with the inquest. She also knew I would be able to recover some damages (which isn't a large sum for bereavement but is all anyone can claim in this sort of situation and was then around £10,000). This sum would at least cover the cost of legal representation at the inquest. Somehow Stephanie managed to get through to my brother and persuaded him that she was really trying to help me. She gave her telephone number to my brother. Then he had to convince me to contact her. I rang Stephanie and she was very supportive.'

The inquest

'Stephanie also told me that an inquest is a public court hearing held by the coroner in order to establish who died and how, when and where the death occurred. The inquest may be held with or without a jury, depending on the circumstances of the death and there usually is a jury in a carbon monoxide case unless the facts are known and agreed. The purpose of the inquest is to discover the facts of the death. She also told me that this can be quite a daunting procedure for anyone, let alone someone like me; a very young woman grieving for her son. I had almost certainly been exposed to carbon monoxide myself too, which can affect the brain. Stephanie urged me to find a good solicitor, used to representing families at inquests, to represent me to make things a bit easier for me.'

'The inquest was very hard for me and I couldn't really function properly. I was thankful that I had a good lawyer who did everything he could possibly do for me.'

Raising awareness

'After the inquest I threw myself into raising awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide and how quickly it can kill. I don't want anyone to suffer as I have. I think there should be more done to raise awareness of the dangers. There should be more help for victims and for charities like CO-Gas Safety which has worked so hard to prevent these tragedies and provided so many families with support at such a difficult time for them. I cannot understand why the gas emergency service doesn't test gas appliances for CO nor why the landlord's gas safety check doesn't have to do this. If a test for CO had been done on the boiler next door, Dom would almost certainly be alive today.'

'Stephanie has worked for over 30 years as a volunteer. I have worked for 20 years. I think it's wrong that such a wealthy fuel industry doesn't even fund the work done voluntarily let alone provide a properly set up organisation with paid people to undertake the data work CO-Gas Safety does and the victim support.'

'Dom would now be 32 years old, probably married and maybe with children of his own. Yet despite all the work done, there is still so little real progress that has been made. I find it strange that despite all the MPs who are supposedly interested, nothing much has happened to prevent these tragedies, learn from them or provide victim support.'

Although not the total solution to CO exposure issues, a carbon monoxide alarm would have saved Dominic and as the property was rented this would now be required by law.

For a guide to the law in all the four nations please see <https://policyconnect.org.uk/news/carbon-monoxide-alarm-regulations-are-changing-are-you-ready/>

Stacey Rodgers continues to work to raise awareness of the issues surrounding carbon monoxide safety. The national registered charity she founded, Dominic Rodgers Trust, has a Facebook page that can be found here: www.facebook.com/groups/105631330388/