

**Death of Katie Overton 2003 – Paul Overton's account typed up by Stephanie Trotter**

[http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/5644895.Landlord\\_fined\\_after\\_gas\\_leak\\_kills\\_11\\_year\\_old\\_girl/](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/5644895.Landlord_fined_after_gas_leak_kills_11_year_old_girl/)

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I am Paul Overton, step father of Katie Overton who died at the age of 11 ½ years due to carbon monoxide poisoning at 7 Oxford Road, Southsea, Portsmouth PO5 1NP a privately rented property, March 29<sup>th</sup> 2003. Although I was her step father I always considered her one of my own children and treated her and loved her exactly the same as my other children.

Below is a description of the incident.

- 1.I discovered Katie not breathing at about 10.00 a.m. on her bed.
- 2.Phoned for an ambulance. I attempted resuscitation but to no avail.
- 3.Katie was taken to hospital, my wife and I travelled up with her.
- 4.The hospital staff informed us after about 20 mins that Katie was dead.
- 5.A post mortem could not establish the cause of death.
- 6.Myself and my wife were under suspicion of murder for the next 10 days.
- 7.10 days after Katie's death I awoke with a banging headache and felt very dizzy as did my wife and other two daughters one aged 7 years 3mths and the other who had just turned 6 years old
- 8.The house smelt as if somebody had left a car running in it. The smell seemed to be coming from the gas boiler.
- 9.We opened all windows and doors. I contacted the letting agent and they sent out a CORGI gas engineer. The engineer tested for carbon monoxide by setting the heating running and placing an ambient air CO detector in the house. He then came outside. After 15 minutes he ran backed in, grabbed the detector and ran back out. The detector recorded a reading of 12,795 parts per million (PPM) of carbon monoxide in the house. The engineer was amazed any of us were alive as the carbon monoxide level was lethal.
- 10.I contacted the police dealing with our case and explained about the carbon monoxide reading and that the gas engineer thought this may be the cause of Katie's death.
- 11.The police contacted British Gas and an investigative team were sent out to our address. They confirmed the CO readings. By this stage Katie had been cremated.
- 12.Katie's blood samples were now tested for carbon monoxide and it was confirmed that this was the cause of death.
- 13.At no time were we advised to get checked for carbon monoxide exposure by the CORGI engineer, British Gas investigative team, the police, the hospital or even the people who tested Katie's blood. These were the pathologists.
- 14.When British Gas investigated it was established that the boiler had not been serviced for at least 3 years but did have safety checks. The Gas Safety Check was due on March 28 2003 but was postponed till April by the Landlord

15. Therefore the gas safety certificate had run out the day before Katie's death. I think the registered gas installer who carried out the safety checks wanted to service the gas boiler but the landlord thought this unnecessary and that only a safety check was required by law.

16. When the boiler was cleaned by the investigative team the carbon monoxide level dropped to 2 ppm proving if servicing had taken place Katie would not have died.

17. I found CO-Gas Safety on the last page (inside cover) of the HSE bereavement leaflet and contacted Stephanie Trotter. Stephanie told me it had taken years of persuasion for HSE to put CO-Gas Safety on the leaflet. Later I became a trustee. I have since learned that the leaflet has been discontinued and that although the charity is on the HSE website, it is very difficult to find. Why is there so little help for victims?



Katie Overton

#### **What we learned from this death**

The need to test for CO in cases of unexplained death for the sake of others living in the house. See <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg18424765-600-the-killer-with-no-name/> 3,500 people between the ages of 16 and 64 die of unexplained death in the UK every year and are not tested for CO according to Dr Mary Shepherd, who receives the hearts of people whose deaths are unexplained.

#### **What would have prevented this death?**

Probably a law requiring a service or at least a test of the gas appliances and a CO alarm to EN 50291.

#### **What happened as a result of this death?**

The landlord was prosecuted for the lack of a Gas Safety Certificate but did he really understand the need for a service in order to keep the gas appliance in a safe condition? The landlord seemed to put pressure on the gas safe registered installer to provide a gas safety certificate while the gas safe registered engineer tried hard to persuade the landlord to undertake a service. Landlord fined £42,000 plus £18,000 costs. **Were either of them really aware of how dangerous CO is?**

#### **What is CO-Gas Safety doing to try to remedy this situation?**

We drafted a clarification/change in the law in 2010 to amend the Gas Regulations to require a landlord to have undertaken by a Registered Gas Installer either a service or test for CO of the gas appliances using equipment capable of testing for CO. This can be found at <http://www.co-gassafety.co.uk/about-co/suggested-changes/>

#### **Support for this clarification/change**

The charity CO-Gas Safety has support for this clarification/change from Pimlico Plumbers, the Dominic Rodgers Trust, Katie Haines Memorial Trust, Holiday Travel Watch, the National Landlords' Association, The Gas Industry Safety Group, the Gas Safety Trust, the All Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG) and IGEM. Please note that British Gas refuses to undertake gas safety checks without a contract to service as well which we think is right and produces the effect we want enshrined in the Regulations. © Copyright CO-Gas Safety 2018

