

Schemes to promote gas safety including awareness of carbon monoxide – Supplementary evidence

Article from sgnmail



PHIL and PAM are CO LIFE SAVERS

IT'S NOT CALLED the silent killer for nothing and the deadly colourless, odourless and tasteless gas Carbon Monoxide (CO) would have claimed yet another victim were it not for the actions of FCO Phil Gingell (above). The London depot man had been called out at midday to a suspected gas escape at a block of flats in south-east London. An 84-year-old lady was in the kitchen, her head in her hands complaining of headaches and feeling unwell.

DANGEROUS

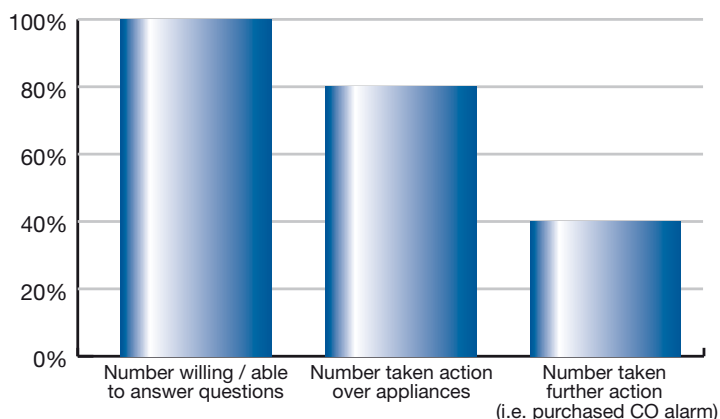
The alarm on Phil's Personal Atmosphere Monitor (PAM) sounded as he entered the kitchen indicating dangerous CO concentrations in the atmosphere. Phil told us: "I immediately ventilated the kitchen and isolated the gas supply and boiler which appeared to have a faulty flue. I also inspected her sealed boiler and noticed the flue was loose where the pipe bent and it was not secure."

RELIEVED

But the story doesn't end there because being concerned for the old lady's well-being Phil found her phone book and phoned her doctor. He was aware she had previously been in to the surgery complaining of headaches so Phil called an ambulance to take her to hospital and waited with the concerned pensioner until the paramedics arrived. Phil added: "I then found out from a neighbour the old lady had reported her concerns to her local council a few weeks early but when they called out they found nothing wrong. I'm just relieved she decided to call us out otherwise I dread to think what might have happened." The good news is the lady has made a full recovery.

With 32 activations of our PAMs we decided to carry out some research and obtain customer feedback to see what actions they subsequently took. Of these 32, we managed to contact 24 with the following results:

Customer feedback results



"The service was second to none, top-notch!"

"Easy to understand advice, very professional!"

Trade Union endorsement

Extract of letter from William Adams, Senior Shop Steward with the GMB Union, based in Edinburgh.



"The introduction and issue of the PAM monitor has brought a further improvement to the health, safety and welfare of the members I represent. It provides a fail-safe for the engineer when called to a reported CO emergency. Until now we have had the protection of a 'Gascoseeker' and PPM to monitor the area for reported escapes but had no equipment to monitor the atmosphere on entering premises when attending a reported CO emergency."

"The PAM reassures the engineers who can be confident of the atmosphere they are entering. It gives a warning when CO may be present and allows them to take the appropriate actions to remove the risk to themselves and the customer. I therefore fully endorse the PAM and the safety benefits which it brings."

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Endorsement of carbon monoxide safety initiatives taken by Scotia Gas Networks

CoGDEM is a trade association whose members are experts in the field of gas detection, so we closely monitor all initiatives that are taken to raise awareness of gas hazards and to consequently protect people's lives. For some years, CoGDEM has been in a position to monitor the relevant carbon monoxide activities of Scotia Gas Networks, especially through our mutual membership of COCAA (Carbon Monoxide Consumer Awareness Alliance) and the ad-hoc Carbon Monoxide Working Group coordinated by Ofgem through 2008 and into 2009.

CoGDEM has been impressed by the CO initiatives that Scotia has taken, which are over and above the joint industry initiatives coordinated by ENA. In particular we would cite three examples:

1. We were made aware of Scotia's desire to enable the National Gas Emergency Service Call Handling staff to offer more advice to callers whose CO alarm was sounding, particularly to help distinguish true alarm events from low-battery indications. When Scotia, leading on behalf of all distribution network owners, commissioned GL (formerly Advantica) to do some work in this area, CoGDEM was pleased to be able to assist Advantica by gathering data from the relevant CO alarm manufacturers to feed into that project. The report happened to highlight some variability in the techniques used by the various alarms to indicate low-battery conditions, as the European performance standard for CO alarms (BS EN 50291) is not specific in this regard. As a direct result of the Scotia project performed by Advantica, CoGDEM has now suggested a review of this standard so that low-battery conditions could be standardized, potentially leading to a more effective response from Call Centre operators when faced with callers whose CO alarms are sounding when they call.
2. In the early stages of the Ofgem CO project (April 2008), CoGDEM was vociferous about the lack of CO detection instrumentation carried by First Call Operatives. From our knowledge of the Health and Safety at Work Act, through to our wish to protect the householder who has called in with a potential CO event, we couldn't understand why the GDNs had historically decided not to equip FCOs with some form of CO detecting instrument. Therefore, we were delighted to hear that Scotia had unilaterally decided to equip their field staff with professional multi-gas portable monitors to warn of piped gas leaks, carbon monoxide spillage or oxygen deficiency. CoGDEM's comments at one of the Ofgem meetings was that we were pleased to see Scotia following "best practice", although other companies at the meeting took issue with our use of that phrase, which we stand by absolutely. Scotia's decision could have been vindicated already, in that within months of the rollout of the Personal Atmosphere Monitors (PAMs as they call them), they have potentially saved lives by alarming of the presence of CO at dwellings where there had been no reports or even suspicion of CO spillage.
3. Scotia has also been active in raising awareness of CO hazards amongst gas consumers, by printed literature, by visits, or recently by the supply of CO alarms into the student sector. This latter example has to be particularly applauded by CoGDEM, as a good percentage of the calls that are made to our own CO helpline come from students in rented accommodation across the UK. Often these calls are made when students feel unwell, search their symptoms on the internet and read about the possibility of CO poisoning, then call us. Obviously, a wider population of CO alarms in student rented accommodation would not only give a level of protection, but would raise the awareness level of CO, and hopefully cause students to ask their landlords about the safety and service record of the gas appliances installed.

CoGDEM is pleased to endorse the initiatives that Scotia has taken, as well as the openness with which they have shared their knowledge across the industry that they operate in. It is obvious that Scotia is doing much more than regulations demand, and we hope that their GDN colleagues across the UK may decide to emulate Scotia's activities highlighted in 2 and 3 above.

Yours faithfully,

Leigh Greenham BSc CEng MIET
Director and Administrator
CoGDEM

Tel: 01462 434322
admin@cogdem.org.uk

Unit 11 Theobald Business Centre, Knowl Piece, Wilbury Way, Hitchin, Herts, SG4 0TY
Website: www.cogdem.org.uk

Fax: 01462 434488

E-mail: