

HSE Warns Landlords to have Gas Appliances Tested -

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has warned landlords to ensure gas appliances are safe for tenants. The warning comes after ten people in three flats were poisoned by carbon monoxide (CO), from a faulty boiler in a flat adjacent to theirs.

HSE prosecuted Thomas Glass Hooper, landlord of Flat 4, Trinity Crescent Wandsworth. He was fined £4400 and ordered to pay £1525 costs at the City of London Magistrates Court, after pleading guilty to two charges under the Gas Safety (Installations and Use) Regulations 1988, today.

On the evening of 26th February 2007, ten occupants of Trinity Crescent suffered CO poisoning as a result of a leak produced by a dangerous boiler in Flat 4. The tenants of Flat 4 were not present on the evening of the incident. The gas leak affected the occupants of flats 1,2 and 3. They were advised by a paramedic to attend St George's Hospital, for treatment for CO poisoning.

An engineer was called out by the Fire Brigade, but was unable to enter the flats because of concerns about the levels of CO. When the engineer eventually entered he disconnected the gas supply to the four properties.

On 2nd March 2007 a HSE and British Gas investigation discovered that the central heating boiler in Flat 4 was producing high levels of CO. Tests showed that CO was detected in the atmosphere and that there was a clear path for the CO to migrate to the upstairs properties, and not out through a flue or a ventilation system.

The Court heard that the gas boiler had not been serviced by a CORGI registered competent person for 20 years. 4000 parts per million in of carbon monoxide present in air is capable of killing someone within 15 minutes. After the incident, tests showed production of over 20,000 parts per million of CO within 15 seconds of the boiler being started.

The victims received oxygen in the hospital that would have reduced the levels of CO in their blood. However, all ten still had levels between 7-16% and that some of the levels could be estimated to have been between 30-40%. Coma can be brought about by levels of 50-60%.

It is the responsibility of every landlord to have gas appliances maintained by a CORGI registered gas inspector and to obtain an annual certificate of the maintenance. It is also essential for flues and ventilation systems to be installed by a CORGI registered competent person.

The prosecuting HSE Inspector Andrew Withers said after the hearing:

"I am pleased the Court took this matter seriously and sent out a message that Landlords must act responsibly. I believe this will be a real deterrent for Landlords who don't bother to look after their tenants. In this case it was very lucky that no one was killed. I believe that if the Carbon Monoxide leak and the poisoning it caused had happened slightly later in the night, this incident could have resulted in a terrible tragedy".

"Keeping gas appliances in a safe condition by having a competent person maintain them is not hard to arrange. Landlords need to realise that they can potentially face charges of manslaughter if they fail in their duties and someone is killed as a result".

