

Gas Safety Week: Engineer of the Year discusses career, regulations and diversity

An award-winning gas specialist at Britain's safety regulator has described the "emotionally taxing" week he spent at the site of an explosion that claimed the life of a two-year-old boy.

Steve Critchlow, a principal registered gas engineer at the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), was called to Mallowdale Avenue in Heysham, Lancashire, following the blast in May 2021.

He stayed at the site for a week as part of his investigation for HSE with his report later supporting the conviction of a man who received 15 years in jail for manslaughter, damaging a gas meter and theft of gas.



Steve Critchlow

"It was a very emotionally taxing and high-profile case," Steve said. "You can have a really massive incident that takes a lot of work."

"The explosion was caused by a next-door neighbour tampering with their gas installation and my work involved attending the scene, doing some laboratory testing and producing a report."

Steve, who was named this year's Engineer of the Year at the National Gas Industry Awards made the comments during this year's Gas Safety Week, an annual awareness week with the goal of keeping the nation gas safe.



Steve (middle) collecting his award at the National Gas Industry Awards

The 50-year-old has also investigated fatal gas explosions in the Cairngorms in 2015 and in Shaw, Oldham, in 2011. Steve's role also requires him to investigate carbon monoxide poisonings, including a fatality in Ipswich in 2012 – which proved to be particularly touching.

Steve, who is from Buxton, explained: “The family of the deceased wrote to me afterwards and sent me a lovely card with a handwritten message just saying how much they appreciated what I had done and they could see I did my very best to explain to them what had happened.

“And I kept that card because that is kind of the motivation every time, why I jump up out of my seat and drive around the country to attend these tragic incidents.”

Alongside his investigation work, Steve's role at HSE requires him to appear in court as an expert evidence provider for gas-related prosecutions. And in July 2023, Steve's incident investigation work saw him named as Engineer of the Year at the National Gas Industry Awards.

A gas inspector with 20 years' experience with HSE, Steve is also responsible for advising fellow HSE inspectors and employers in the gas industry. HSE guidance can be found at: [Gas – HSE](#).



Steve attending the scene of a gas explosion in Haxby, York

All too often, Steve has seen what can happen when employers do not adhere to gas safety regulations, which is why he believes it so important businesses safely maintain their gas installations.

He said: “It is very tempting for businesses to try and save money, to try to save time by not looking after their gas installations.

“It’s a highly regulated industry and the reason for that is because we know it can go wrong with fires and explosions and there is also a risk of carbon monoxide poisoning if appliances are not maintained regularly.

“Businesses using gas have a duty to maintain their gas installations and if they don’t, then it is imperative HSE takes action against them. That sends the clear message that we have regulations, guidance and standards in place you have to follow to ensure safety.”

Reflecting on this year’s Gas Safety Week theme encouraging diversity among Gas Safe Registered engineers, Steve commented: “Things are improving, there is an increasing number of women going in to gas engineering and why shouldn’t they be – it is open to all people. The gas networks are increasing the number of women in their workforce, so there are definite steps in the right direction.

“Diversity needs to be normalised. There are around 56 million people with gas appliances in their homes – it’s increasingly important that the trusted engineers who keep those families safe must better reflect the communities they are serving.”

Notes to Editors:

1. The [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise.
2. More information about the [legislation](#) referred to in this case is available.
3. Further details on the latest [HSE news releases](#) is available.