

Dog detects underground gas leak at home, alerts owner

‘I always thought he was special, but I really have a newfound respect for his intelligence,’ Chanell Bell said about her pup Kobe

By [Sydney Page](#) January 20, 2024 WashPost



Kobe, a 4-year-old husky, standing by the hole he dug outside his home in Philadelphia on Dec. 21. (Chanell Bell)

Chanell Bell had no idea that a major gas leak was brewing beneath her front yard in Philadelphia, but her dog, Kobe, seemed to know.

Kobe — a 4-year-old husky — dug a hole in the dirt outside Bell’s rental semidetached townhouse in the Germantown neighborhood in mid-December. Bell, 28, was perplexed by his behavior.

“He’s definitely not a digger,” she said. “He has never just randomly dug a hole.”

Although it was unlike him, Bell said, she refilled the hole with dirt and moved on. A few days later, though, Kobe dug another hole — in the same spot.

Bell, who lives with her 8-year-old daughter, was about to set up Christmas decorations on Dec. 21 and brought Kobe outside to accompany her. Soon, he started digging again.



Kobe with Bell's daughter, Juliana, 8. (Chanell Bell)

“It totally threw me off,” said Bell, who runs a small cleaning company and a vintage clothing business.

The dog stood beside the hole, his paws covered in dirt.

“Kobe, why are you doing that?” Bell asked her pooch.

He gave her a look — which she didn’t interpret as a look of guilt or shame, but of pride.

“You know when a dog does something wrong, and he knows he did something wrong? He didn’t give me that look at all,” said Bell. “He was giving me a look like ‘I did it, and I don’t regret it.’”

Bell thought perhaps he did it for a reason.



Kobe isn't usually a digger, Bell said. (Chanell Bell)

The month prior, Bell had a small gas leak from her heater. Once it was repaired, she decided to get a handheld gas detection device to identify any other gas-related issues.

Since she had recently dealt with a gas leak, “my intuition told me to take the reader down there to the hole. I didn’t expect to find anything at all,” she said.

When put the reader by the hole, it “went off like crazy,” she said.



Bell holding a gas detection device near the hole her dog dug. (Chanell Bell)

Bell called Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW), and staff showed up to assess the situation. They told Bell the leak — which was caused by a rusting pipe — was “really serious,” and even flipping on a light switch could have blown up her house, she said.

“I was shocked beyond words,” Bell said, adding that gas was leaking from an underground street pipe, directly underneath where Kobe dug the hole.

[Firefighter jumps in icy pond, rescues growling dog](#)

In an emailed statement to The Washington Post, PGW said it “was able to locate and successfully repair the service line and make the location safe.”

The statement also mentioned that natural gas is odorless, and for safety reasons, “PGW adds the odorant mercaptan to natural gas to produce a rotten egg-like odor for easy detection and public awareness.”

Clive Wynne, the director of the [Canine Science Collaboratory](#) at Arizona State University, said dogs can indeed [detect gas](#) — especially when mercaptan is present.



Kobe relaxing at home. (Chanell Bell)

“It’s a bad food smell, and those are smells that our dogs take a special interest in,” said Wynne, adding that dogs can also detect the whistling sound of a leaking gas pipe.

“The reason that the dog would smell it when a human doesn’t is twofold,” he said. “One is that the dog’s nose is far more sensitive than a human’s, and they’re usually only an inch off the ground, whereas our noses are five to six feet off the ground.”

Wynne said stories like this are more common than most people realize.

“It’s something dogs do for us,” he said.

Bell said the leak could have been catastrophic for the whole neighborhood. After PGW workers repaired the pipe in front of her house, they discovered that other pipes were also leaking, directly impacting Bell’s next-door neighbor, and another neighbor across the street.



After PGW repaired the pipe about five feet from Bell's house, they discovered that other pipes were also leaking, directly impacting Bell’s next-door neighbor, and another neighbor across the street. (Courtesy of Chanell Bell)

“It wasn’t that Kobe found a new habit, it was really him discovering something and protecting us and our neighbors,” she said.

“We all had to get our gas turned off,” Bell said. “It was a three-day thing.”

Given that gas is highly flammable, gas leaks can increase the risk of a fire or deadly explosion, and can also [lead to carbon monoxide poisoning](#) in people and pets.

“They still have signs out there for people not to park, and just to be aware,” said Bell, noting that PGW workers had to dig up parts of the sidewalk and street, and repairs are still underway.

If not for Kobe, Bell said, “We never would have known.”

“Just knowing that something awful was prevented is amazing,” said Bell, who credits her dog for saving the day. “I always thought he was special, but I really have a newfound respect for his intelligence.”

Bell posted a video detailing the sequence of events [on social media](#), resulting in thousands of views and comments from people praising her pooch. She was first interviewed [by SWNS Media Group, a U.K.-based news agency](#).

In the month since Kobe detected the gas leak, Bell wrote and published a children’s book called [“The Dog That Saved the Block Before Christmas”](#) — at the request of several commenters.

“I wanted to have something that was memorable for me and my family, and I also wanted to raise awareness, because not many people know what to watch out for with gas leaks,” Bell said. “We should pay attention to our dogs’ senses.”

The ordeal taught her a valuable lesson, she said: “Listen to your fur babies. They might be onto something.”
