

# PROconcept

Providing advice for care and nursing homes

**IN FOCUS**

*Laundry  
efficiency*

THE TIME FACTOR



**Let's get to the point**

The underlooked aspects of efficiency



# Are you always as efficient as you should be?



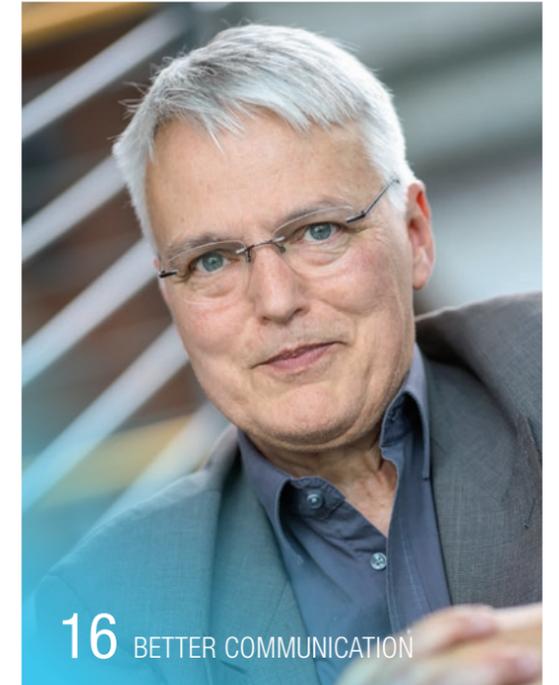
In all likelihood, you've already given a lot of thought about how efficient your laundry department is, so you'll be no stranger to tight budgeting or analysing costs and performance. And it's no wonder, because efficiency is an important objective to pursue in today's market. In this edition, however, we explore whether there are other factors necessary for running an efficient laundry department other than looking at cold, hard figures. In doing so, we discovered a lot of things we hadn't considered before. One example is the time factor, which is crucial for the in-house laundry department at the Carl von Heß Foundation in Hammelburg in order to process 750 kg of laundry every day to a high standard of quality (see page 6). We also learned about the advantages of the human factor. According to the researcher Bernd Kleinheyer, keeping workers happy and healthy helps to sustainably maintain effective laundry facilities (see page 16). Perhaps these are some factors that you too can consider the next time you're thinking about the efficiency of your laundry department.

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## IMPRINT

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Female residents are particularly cautious about strangers washing and ironing their clothes.

WHEN LAUNDRY IS HANDLED BY THIRD PARTIES

## FEMALE RESIDENTS ARE MORE SENSITIVE THAN MALES

Knowing who is handling your personal clothing and how they are doing it has an appreciable effect on resident wellbeing. According to Angelika Sennlaub, a Professor of Hospitality Management at the Hochschule Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, residents in retirement homes feel particularly vulnerable when it comes to this issue. That's because, in these institutions, personal laundry is washed, ironed and put away by relative strangers. Female residents in retirement homes are particularly sensitive to this. "When they were living in their own homes, most of these women were fully in charge of the household and had full control not only over their own laundry but also the laundry of the other members of the family," explains Angelika Sennlaub. On this basis, Angelika concludes that female residents are more sensitive than males when it comes to laundry and washing. //

### LOW-TEMPERATURE WASHING

## WHAT ARE THE PROS AND CONS?

Low-temperature washing processes are effective at as low as 40 °C and are ideal for delicate fabrics. Thanks to the use of innovative washing machines and detergents, perfect washing results are achieved while saving energy and time and protecting the laundry and the washing machine. What's more, low-temperature washing causes fewer limescale problems. With low temperature washing, detergents that are suitable for low temperatures must be used. **Tip:** Take the degree of soiling of your laundry into account. Only use low-temperature washing programmes for lightly soiled, hygienically non-sensitive laundry, and be sure to treat any stains beforehand. Now and then you should also select washing cycles set at temperatures of 60 °C and above, using a heavy duty powder detergent. This will minimise the risk of a biofilm forming in your washing machine and promoting the growth of unwanted germs.

**47**  
litres of water  
are used by each  
household worldwide  
every day for washing  
laundry.

## MORE EFFECTIVE SEPARATION

When washing laundry, how do you keep dirty washing separate from the clean side of the laundry facility in order to stop germs passing from one to the other? This is a subject addressed by Bernhard Purkrabek, Sales Manager at Miele Professional Switzerland, to attendees of a hygiene conference with a special focus on laundry and dishwasher equipment from Miele Professional Switzerland. His recommendation to a group of 140 managers of professional laundry facilities was to install washing machines that can be opened and loaded from opposite sides. But if this is not possible due to a lack of space, he says, the machines should be arranged according to the workflow from dirty to clean. Another option would be to separate the dirty and clean stages in terms of timing, making sure the stages don't overlap. //



Another hygiene tip: Only take out perfectly cleaned load items if your hands are clean. Alternatively, use clean gloves.

### PRACTICAL TIPS



## IN-HOUSE LAUNDRY: WASHING YOUR OWN WORKWEAR

Uniforms worn every day in nursing homes for the elderly are subject to plenty of physical strain and soiling. And they will be used for a number of years, so they have to be comfortable and practical. This can be achieved by implementing the right kind of in-house laundry care system using professional washing machines. These form the basis for ensuring reliable disinfection of uniforms. This is especially important in facilities where there is a risk of contamination by pathogens. Washing uniforms in-house in retirement homes protects not only staff and their families from disease, but also the residents themselves.

In contrast, washing uniforms at home using domestic washing machines can be risky because the machines don't guarantee a defined temperature holding time, which is required for disinfection. This can release harmful germs into the domestic environment, and because there are inadequate measures to guard against infection, the risk of contamination is high.

Having in-house laundry facilities, however, offers the perfect quality management solution with the following advantages:

- Simple logistics in a closed-loop, in-house system
- Cleaning compliant with guidelines
- Laundry is available in no time, to high standards of cleanliness
- Washing with approved and efficient disinfecting programmes
- Cost-efficient cleaning, even of small loads
- A continuously monitored disinfection process
- Improved washing durability through careful laundry care

The attire worn by the staff has a tangible impact on visitors, residents and the staff themselves. With its quality and unmistakable style, it identifies members of staff as representatives of the institution they work for. In recent years modern fashion trends have gained a foothold in professional attire. Tapered fit, easy-care and breathable materials, and bright colours are the key elements in modern professional apparel. Operating in-house laundry facilities allows you to be responsive to the range of different requirements that apply to laundry care. In addition, a well-groomed appearance boosts team spirit amongst the staff. //

## 60° UNIFORMS

These are made from cotton or a cotton blend fabric and according to the laundry care symbol they have to be washable at 60 degrees and above and suitable for tumble drying as well as thermal and chemo-thermal disinfection.

→ See our report on page 6 regarding the nursing home in Hammelburg for an example of successful practical implementation.

After transporting laundry, Karl-Heinz Rehm helps out the laundry team and unloads a tumble dryer.

## DISCOVERING THE TIME FACTOR

*To handle 750 kilograms of laundry every day, every detail has to be right. The new in-house laundry facility at the Carl von Heß Foundation in Hammelburg shows us how it's done.*

**F**rom 8 in the morning, Karl-Heinz Rehm (60) is king of the road. He drives a seven-and-a-half tonne truck to deliver fresh laundry to the Bavarian towns of Bad Brückenau and Münnerstadt, where the Carl von Heß Foundation operates three retirement homes (Waldenfels, St. Elisabeth and Juliusspital). Once he arrives in one of these homes, he unloads the containers with clean laundry for the residents, replacing them with sacks holding dirty washing. Just under three hours later, his tour comes to a close as he arrives at the Dr.-Maria-Probst retirement home in Hammelburg, Bavaria – home to the Foundation's new in-house laundry facility. This has been completely revamped by Miele's planning team, who also supervised the construction on site.

### Progress through RFID technology

Having arrived at this destination, Mr Rehm finds that the team led by head laundry technician Gabriele Hepp has already started work. The team includes ten members of staff working in two shifts – from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and 9.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Once Rehm has delivered the sacks of dirty washing to the unclean side of the facility, Andrea Wallasch and Ronald Beck scan them in. Each item of laundry has a patch containing a wash-resistant RFID chip, which contains the item's identification number, while the name of its

Save time by putting in place a holistic concept. In addition to appliances from Miele, this encompasses the construction and installation planning, staff training, and a full service package which includes annual machine maintenance and all relevant costs for six years.

owner, the number of washing cycles and washing requirements are stored in a special software application. The advantage of using digital equipment from Thermotex is that the radio signals from the RFID chips allow you to trace exactly where the laundry has been, guaranteeing a seamless laundry cycle and eliminating the risk of laundry items being mixed up. Moreover, the technology saves time in every stage of the process, which is important for ensuring the laundry cycle operates efficiently in an in-house laundry department. Once laundry is scanned into the system, the washing requirements and temperature are immediately shown on the monitor, after which the laundry items can be sent straight to the container for the relevant washing programme.

**A pooled solution for seven nursing homes**  
The unclean side of the facility features 5 hygienic wall-partition washing machines (4 x 32 kg machines and 1 x 16 kg machine) used for washing the laundry. These are already loaded and programmed the evening before so that staff can start work on the washed laundry at the beginning of a shift and therefore work ten hours at full capacity. “We start settings the programmes at about five-thirty,” explains Gabriele Hepp. “We mostly set disinfection programmes in order to guarantee a high standard of hygiene.” Contaminated laundry or flat laundry (i.e. bed linen, towels and washcloths) is washed in the closed sacks in which they are delivered. This is possible because the Foundation decided to use the same flat laundry in each of its seven nursing homes. This “pooled”

solution removes the need for time-consuming laundry sorting. After being washed, the fabrics are dried in one of the three gas dryers, which each have a load capacity of 32 kg. Time is an important factor here as well. “Dryers powered by gas are faster and cheaper to run than electric ones,” explains Miele engineer Stefan Bohde. Then, in the final stage of the laundry cycle, the T-shirts, underwear and towels are folded and laid manually by the staff. Blouses, shirts and trousers are finished either on the two ironing stations, the universal finisher or the trouser finisher from Veit. “These appliances make the final finishing stage much quicker,” adds Stefan Bohde, “You need only two minutes to process a single laundry item. Manual ironing, on the other hand, takes on average three to four minutes per item.”

Most of the time-savings are achieved in the sorting process, which for members of staff like Miora Faur has become child’s play thanks to RFID technology. The procedure involves Miora swiping each freshly laundered item over an antenna plate. A screen then immediately shows which shelf the laundry should be sorted into, and a green light flashes in front of the relevant shelf. Once she has sorted the item into the right shelf, the light goes out, so there’s no chance of sorting items incorrectly. The fully sorted laundry is then placed into a shelf container in the personal laundry sacks. The contain-

FACTS AND FIGURES



465

residents

in the Foundation's seven retirement homes

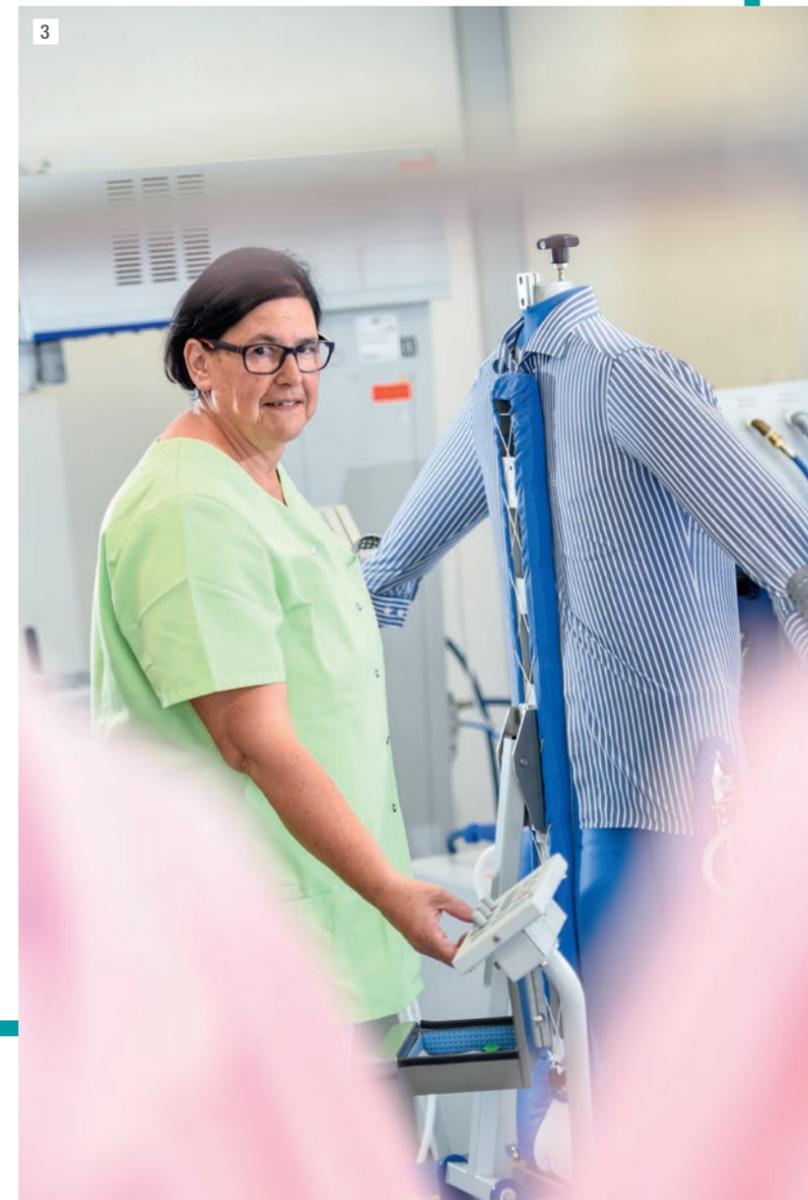
1876

Founding of the Carl von Heß Foundation

This includes the retirement homes in Hammelburg (Dr.-Maria-Probst), Bad Brückenau (Waldenfels centre), Münnerstadt (St. Elisabeth centre and Juliusspital), Zeitlofs (Haus Rafael retirement home), Oberthulba (Thulbatal retirement home) and the Euerdorf retirement home.



How to save time: Andrea Wallasch (1) patches up new laundry items with the RFID chip. The digital RFID technology from Thermotex makes it possible to trace where exactly an item of laundry has been – for example, when a T-shirt is finished (2). Angelika Wetzel (3) uses the ironing dummy from Veit in order to finish a shirt, which is a much faster method than using a hand iron.



“We now have more control over the quality of our laundry.”

Marco Schäfer, Foundation Executive Director



Happy at work: Gabriele Hepp and Anita Heger (4) operate the 2.5 metre wide flatwork ironer. For Miora Faur (6), sorting fresh laundry is almost child's play thanks to the RFID technology (5).

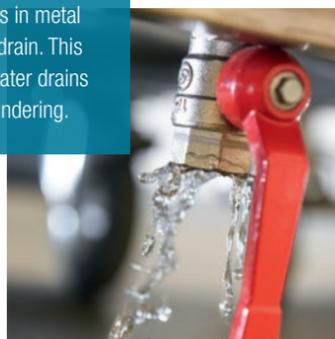


er is then stored in the storage area for clean laundry. The next morning, Karl-Heinz Rehm takes the shelf containers into his truck and begins his journey once again – this time to the municipalities of Zeitlofs, Oberthulba and Euerdorf, where the Foundation runs other retirement homes.

Thanks to the numerous small solutions introduced into the laundry cycle, a lot of time can be saved in order to launder 750 kilograms of washing every day, economically and efficiently, and to a high standard of quality. The Carl von Heß Foundation had to take on this challenge as the complaints regarding external laundering services were piling up. So the decision was then made to operate an in-house laundry department. This made sense for another reason as well: “As we do the catering for our residents in-house and have our own cleaning company, an on-premise laundry facility fits the bill perfectly,” says marketing manager Sina Bretscher. Yet more grounds for the Foundation’s superiority is explained by the Foundation’s Executive Director Marco Schäfer: “We have now reached a size at which implementing this kind of system pays off.” And he has a point – the seven retirement homes run by the Foundation accommodate a total of 465 people, all of whom need fresh laundry every week. The laundry facilities also handle everything needed by facility management, as well as bed and kitchen linen and staff uniforms. All this laundry is collected, washed and returned on time because we have discovered the time factor – something which allows us to succeed every day. //

**TIP TAP**

Store wet mops in metal trolleys with a drain. This way, the dirty water drains off before laundering.



**HAMMELBURG LAUNDRY CHECKLIST**

**Types of laundry**

- Flat laundry (bed linen, table linen, laundry to be ironed, etc.)
- Towelling
- Outerwear (residents' private laundry)
- Workwear

**Transport from resident areas to the laundry facility**

- Yes  No

**Is residents' private laundry collected in personal laundry sacks?**

- Yes  No

**Separation of laundry by type**

- Flatwork and towelling
- Residents' private laundry/workwear

**Initial scan of residents' private laundry**

- Yes  No

**Final scan of residents' private laundry**

- Yes  No

**Sorting of residents' private laundry**

- Yes  No

**Washed in**

- Front-loading washing machine with protective screen
- Washing machine with separated clean/unclean side

**Heating type**

- Steam  Gas
- Electricity  Solar

**Specialised wash processes**

- E.g. WetCare
- Other: reprocessing of mops and cloths

**Are items to be ironed?**

- Yes  No

“Numerous small changes can make work a lot more enjoyable.”



**INTERVIEW**

**GABRIELE HEPP**

Head of the Carl von Heß Foundation's in-house laundry facility explains why a pooled solution makes life easier for everyone at work.

**The laundry facility went into operation at the beginning of the year, effectively replacing external laundry services overnight. What did you find most challenging about that?** *The sheer volume of laundry from seven different institutions. At first we had no idea how we were going to cope, so we came up with a system which has since stood us in good stead.*

**What does this system look like?** *There are three key aspects. Firstly, we wash the laundry from three of the Foundation's retirement homes every day except for Tuesdays, when we do the laundry from the Dr.-Maria-Probst retirement home – the largest of the seven institutions with 120 residents. Secondly, every shift has its own specific tasks. For example, the first shift concentrates initially on residents' private laundry, including sorting them and getting them ready for washing, and the second shift then involves washing the flat laundry and bed linen. This gives us enough leeway so that we can respond to any requirements and juggle between days and shifts. Thirdly, we have adopted a pooled solution for flat laundry such as towels and washcloths.*

**A pooled solution for all seven retirement homes?** *Yes, precisely. The pooled laundry system, which also covers clothing protection and kitchen linen, rotates between the seven homes run by the Foundation. This makes much of what we do on a daily basis much easier, and it allows us to save money and time. And if the bed linen is then included in the pooled system, we can save even more time.*

**The pooled laundry is delivered in special sacks?** *We operate what is basically a sack system, sorting the bed linen into orange sacks, flat laundry into green ones, kitchen linen in yellow ones, contaminated laundry into brown ones, workwear into blue ones and residents' private laundry into white ones.*

**Have the staff received special training?** *Of course! We have received complete training from Miele on the laundry cycle, as well as for the washing machines, tumble dryers and ironers. Veit has also held training courses on the finisher appliances, and Thermotex has trained us on input and output scanning as well as RFID technology. We've also had training in hygiene in order to prevent cross-contamination in the laundry cycle. So we wear protective clothing at the unclean side of the facility and when washing the mops, which is carried out in a separate room.*

**Is there a lot of focus on health and safety as well?** *Absolutely. We've put in place a number of measures already. For example, most rooms are lit by daylight or 500 lux ceiling lights, and the laundry is moved around the facility using spring-suspension lift trucks, which make lifting the laundry much easier. The trolleys used for the dirty mops are fitted with a tap on their base, through which the water from the wet mops can drain off. This ensures the mops are not as heavy when lifting them into the machine. These many small changes have made working in the laundry facility more enjoyable overall.*

**Do the residents benefit from this as well?** *I recently met with the spokeswoman for the residents' council, who has been living in the Dr.-Maria-Probst retirement home for almost ten years. She told me she was very happy with the quality of the laundry. By all accounts, it's never been so good!*

# TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

The workflows in the new in-house laundry facility at the Carl von Hefß Foundation are efficiently organised. This saves time, making it possible to launder 750 kg of washing – hygienically and to a high standard of quality.

**DIRTY LAUNDRY**  
**750 KG PER DAY**  
 Including residents' private laundry, bed linen, kitchen linen, staff workwear and cleaning cloths

**EQUIPMENT**

**5 X BARRIER WASHING MACHINES**  
 4 x 32 kg hygiene washing machines,  
 1 x 16 kg hygiene washing machine  
 (all powered by electricity)

**3 X TUMBLE DRYERS**  
 3 x 32 kg load capacity (all powered by gas)

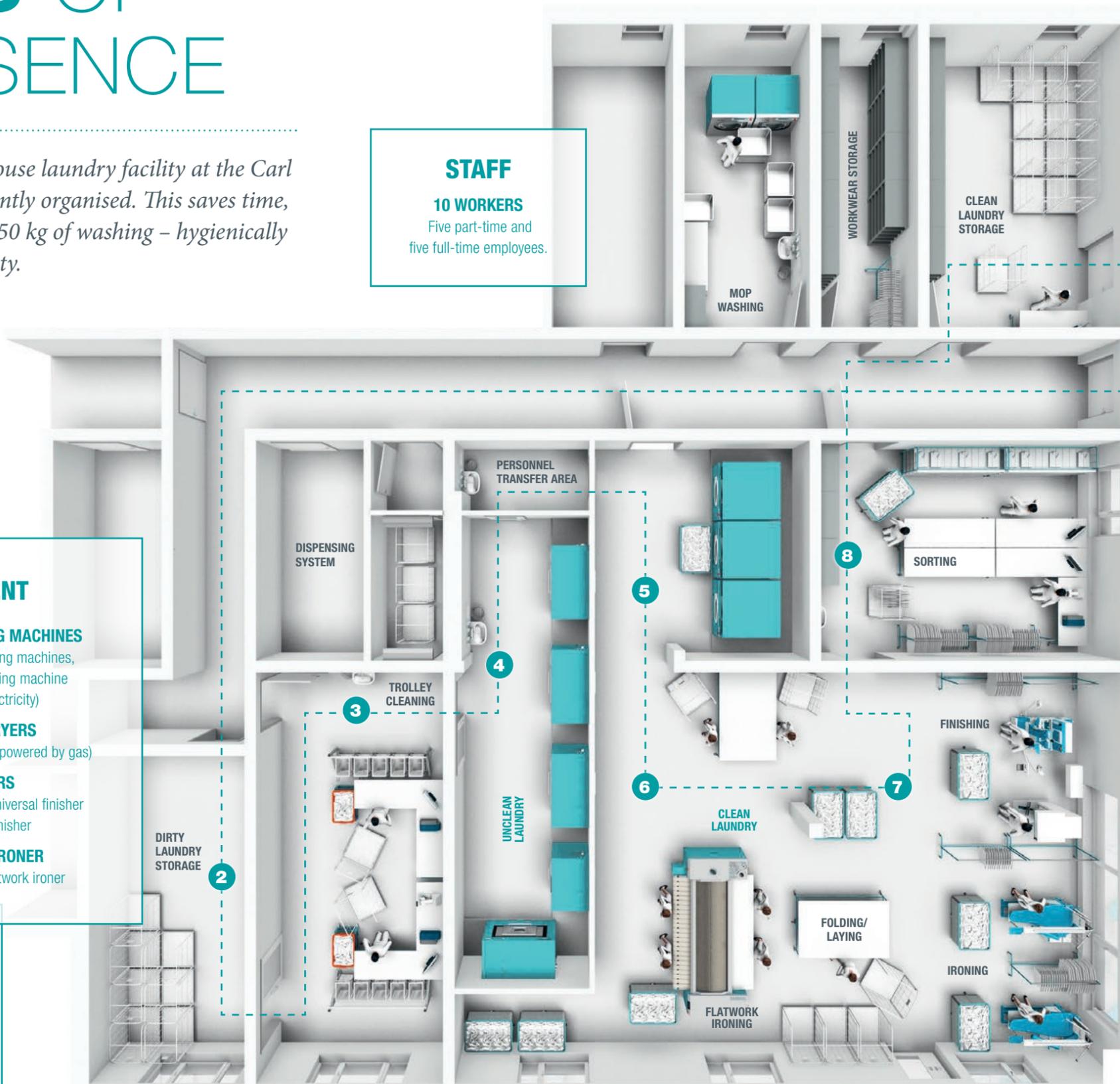
**4 X FINISHERS**  
 2 x ironing stations, 1 x universal finisher  
 and 1 x trouser finisher

**1 X FLATWORK IRONER**  
 1 X 2.5-metre wide flatwork ironer

**WORKING HOURS**

**50 HOURS PER WEEK**  
 Monday to Friday,  
 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**STAFF**  
**10 WORKERS**  
 Five part-time and five full-time employees.



- THE LAUNDRY CYCLE**
- 1 DIRTY LAUNDRY ENTRY**  
 Dirty laundry is delivered from the six nearby institutions.
  - 2 INPUT OF DIRTY LAUNDRY TO THE CYCLE**  
 All of the dirty laundry from all seven homes – the washing from the Dr.-Maria-Probst retirement home is delivered by cart – and the workwear and kitchen linens are added to the laundry cycle before the scan-in.
  - 3 DIRTY LAUNDRY INPUT SCAN**  
 All of the dirty laundry is scanned in at the unclean side of the facility and sent to the corresponding spring-suspension lift trucks for the relevant washing programme.
  - 4 WASHING**  
 The dirty laundry is washed at the unclean side in five hygiene barrier washing machines.
  - 5 DRYING**  
 After the washing process, the laundry is removed from the machines at the clean side of the facility and then dried in three gas-powered tumble dryers with a load capacity of 32 kg.
  - 6 FOLDING**  
 Underwear, T-shirts and towels are folded by hand after drying in the clean side of the facility.
  - 7 FINISHING**  
 Blouses, shirts and trousers are finished at two ironing stations, a universal finisher and a trouser finisher from Veit.
  - 8 SORTING**  
 Using RFID technology, each item of laundry is sorted and allocated to its owner in a shelf system.
  - 9 STORAGE AND DISPATCH**  
 The fresh laundry is put into temporary storage before being dispatched. In the Dr.-Maria-Probst retirement home, the laundry is distributed to residents' rooms once a week by the laundry technician. The other six homes are supplied with fresh laundry twice a week by truck.

# INTO THE DISHWASHER

*Fast, clean, hygienic and efficient – the four key requirements of a good dishwasher. These tips will show you how to get the most out of your appliance.*

1



## Working in harmony

A dishwasher is most efficient when the water quality, detergent and dispensing quantity are optimised for the load in question and the degree of soiling. The basic settings of the machine is therefore particularly important.

*Ask your service representative for assistance.*



## Pre-rinse

Large amounts of food residues should be removed before the dishes are loaded into the machine. Starchy foods such as potatoes are particularly problematic because they form a crust on the dishes which is difficult to remove.

*Here it's a good idea to quickly rinse the dishes with lukewarm (!) water.*



## Professional dishwasher detergent

Professional machines require professional detergents. Common household detergents normally dissolve too late because of the short programme times. Specially optimised formulations are therefore required.

*Detergents should be stored in a dry, dark and cool place. Be sure to observe the use-by date!*



## Correct dispensing

Always observe the dispensing recommendations. This ensures that the required quantity of detergent can be optimised for the degree of soiling of the load in question.

*More is not always better.*



## Water hardness

The water hardness affects what kind of detergents will be suitable and the amount to be dispensed. The best thing to do is ask for support from your service representative in order to optimise your setup.

*Water treatment systems help to keep the water free of limescale.*



## Smart loading

Load glassware at a slight angle to make sure that the water drains off and that they dry properly. Cutlery should be loaded pointing up. Large, heavy items should be loaded into the lower basket.

*The baskets show you the direction in which dishes should be loaded, so the design is fairly intuitive.*



## Leave to dry

Dishes that are taken straight out of the dishwasher are sensitive because of the temperature, so they break more easily.

*Allow the dishes to cool down for a few minutes before putting them away.*



## Unloading your machine

Unload the machine from the bottom first in order to avoid water droplets falling onto the clean dishes. Never put away wet or moist dishes – water is a breeding ground for bacteria!

*Before putting away dishes, don't forget to wash your hands!*



## Machine care

If available, the "maintenance wash" programme should be activated regularly (alternatively, use the "Intensive" or "Hygiene" programmes). This helps to break down grease, starch or protein build-up.

*Minimum temperature during cleaning: 70 °C*



## Pay close attention

Check the seals, filters, spray arms and basket wheels regularly for deposits and clean on a regular basis.

*Use a damp cloth or a brush to carefully remove dirt.*

# HOW IMPORTANT ARE HAPPY WORKERS?

Many businesses today have armed themselves with brand new appliances and a wealth of digital technology, but this is no guarantee for success. What's missing from the equation?

*When a business introduces new processes, workflows or appliances, the biggest challenge is to maintain communication with workers. The company must win them over to this new way of thinking, because they are the ones who have to deal with the new work processes or machines on a daily basis. The problem is not the technology itself. The biggest challenge is to persuade workers to adopt new processes and workflows. It's the communication and therefore the transfer of ideas from management to employees. However, these new things can't be introduced without working on the dynamics, team-building and hierarchies within the company at the same time. This is often a painful process and cannot be achieved overnight. So you have to come up with a way of starting on the right footing and winning over your employees to your way of thinking.*

**So what's the best way to communicate with your workers?** *The important thing is to make sure communication is not meaningless. It must be clearly and credibly communicated to employees that innovations will not fundamentally change their way of working, but that, for example, the new appliances and workflows will make their routine activities easier and will allow them*

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“*Keeping workers happy and healthy helps to sustainably maintain a successful business.*”

*to share the advantages they will bring. The company must therefore be willing to redesign something in such a way that the employees move along with it. So you will have to communicate exactly what you need to happen. The term “holistic” is an important one here. It must be made easy for employees to adapt to the new processes and incentives must be created, but employees must also be given the freedom to make mistakes. There are also things like sensible health and safety management to consider. If you link all this together, then the message you're sending the employees of your retirement home's new in-house laundry facility is: “We are incentivising change and trying to create a working environment that is attractive to you and guarantees the most important thing: the care of our residents.”*

**You are heavily involved in the subject of return on prevention. What does this mean exactly?** *For me, prevention means first and foremost preventive care for employees – on the long term. This leads to happy employees being much more motivated to help achieve their company's objectives. This then has a sustainable impact on the success of the business. The satisfaction of employees increases if they are looked after and cared for holistically, which has an immediate impact on the overall work environment. Although I'm not familiar with all the details of nursing care for the elderly,*

*this means that the wellbeing of employees is crucial for the well-being of the retirement home residents. Sustainability must therefore be reflected at all levels of the organisation – even in areas where new appliances are used on a daily basis, such as in-house laundry facilities.*

**When the workers are happy, are the residents happy too?** *Yes, of course! In fact, it's absolutely necessary. The wellbeing of employees, who perform their duties day in and day out, is crucial for ensuring the wellbeing of residents. If they are frequently chided, harangued over being five minutes late, or if there are rigid hierarchical structures, the mood will be brought down and it will also have an effect on the residents.*

**So how do I keep my employees happy? By paying them more?** *That's definitely one option! But it's not just the pay that matters. Equally important for the employees are their health, the social atmosphere in the company and the sharing of responsibility. In short, you must have a high degree of respect and appreciation for their work. That really is key. //*

## RETURN ON PREVENTION

Forging working conditions in which people can work safely and healthily is an important element for social cohesion, but it also makes sense from an economic point of view. A sustainable approach to occupational health and safety improves operating procedures and business relationships while reducing costs. Improved working conditions and an appreciation for the work put in by employees boost their motivation and reduce the time taken off. The question as to whether operational prevention measures are also worthwhile for the business is raised by many companies. Studies by the International Labour Organization (ILO) show that occupational safety and economic efficiency are not incompatible with one another. More info at: [www.ilo.org/safework](http://www.ilo.org/safework)

# KEEPING EVERYTHING MOBILE

*The renowned orthopaedic specialist Dr Christian Brinkmann explains what monotonous movements and a twinge in the back have to do with efficiency.*

Dr Brinkmann: keeping mobile is of course a good thing. Workers in retirement homes and in-house laundry facilities move around a lot, but they often suffer from backache. Why is this?

When you move your body, everything is put under stress. Intervertebral discs, ligaments, musculature, joints – all these structures have to interlock in order for the movement to function well. If the structure is distorted, there are changes brought about by wear and tear which manifest themselves as pain. Such sources of interference include a weak musculature, but also repetitive, monotonous, difficult movements and straining.

**What are the consequences?** Patients generally experience wear-related changes in the facet joints that lead to spinal canal stenosis. This narrowing of the spinal canal occurs when the small joints in your spinal cord are put under strain, causing osteoarthritis. Often, bone can grow and extend into the spinal canal. When this occurs on a large scale, the result is spinal canal stenosis. This can lead to pressure on the nerves and pain, which can radiate into the legs.

**Who might be particularly vulnerable to back problems?** The problems occur more frequently with increasing age because it is a wear-re-

lated process. So from the age of 50 or 60 years it becomes more likely. At this age you will have to do something about it.

**And how do the consequences of a lack of workplace ergonomics affect efficiency and productivity?** The damage can be enormous. Back problems are the number one cause for medical leave – that's a real problem. I think this does have something to do with our lifestyle – we move too little, and when we do our movements are too repetitive. It's so important to stay active and look after yourself. Many wait too long until the problem is acute and they're forced to begin treatment, which is a shame.

**How can you deal with this in places like laundry departments?** What's really important is having the right workstation design. This can be achieved by making work processes more back-friendly and setting up the machines at a height where they can be easily loaded and unloaded using a range of movements and thus avoid repetitive movements. Monotonous work makes everything rather miserable as well. The musculoskeletal system responsible for posture is badly affected if you keep it under stress for prolonged periods of time. Especially for the small facet joints or the muscles, standing for a long time is a long-term strain. Bending over

is also a strain you should watch out for. Alternating movements are just better for your body because the spinal cord wants to be moved around, so try to switch between walking, standing and sitting as much as you can. It also makes sense to take preventive action at an early stage to prevent long-term issues and even surgery. Whatever you do, don't just leave it until the employee reports a problem.

**What can employees themselves do to stay active?** Prevention is key. It's not too difficult to learn the posture and movements necessary to maintain a healthy back. There is plenty of information around on classes and support from physiotherapists. They explain how you should move your body optimally when under working conditions, how repetitive movements can be avoided, as well as how to lift heavy items properly. It's also important to look after your musculature. //

“The spinal cord wants to be moved around, so try to switch between walking, standing and sitting as much as you can.”



**DR CHRISTIAN BRINKMANN**

is the head physician at the St. Josef-Stift Sendenhorst spinal surgery clinic in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). His team of doctors treats nearly 6000 inpatients and outpatients every year.

## TIPS FOR STAYING FIT DURING BREAKS

by Peter Müller, physiotherapist

### HIP SWIVEL

#### LOOSENS THE SPINAL COLUMN

Sit with your back straight and your hips wide. Place your hands above your hip bone. Now move your hips slowly forwards and backwards, keeping your upper body stable.



### SIDE GLANCE

#### MOBILISES THE SPINAL COLUMN

Sit with your back straight and hips wide and put your hands on the back of your head. Rotate the upper body to one side, keeping the upper body stable. Alternate this movement left and right.



### REACHING FOR THE STARS

#### STRENGTHENS THE SPINAL COLUMN

The initial situation resembles a ski jumper before the jump: knees bent, buttocks outstretched, straight back. Alternate between raising your right and left arm over your head, holding it there for a short amount of time.



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*I feel warm and cosy in  
my winter clothes. They're  
looked after by Miele.*

*Johanna Hawel  
Mayerling facility,  
Alland, Austria*

