

# Hygiene – a concept, not a nuisance

SINCE DECEMBER 2008 THE LANDBÄCKEREI IHLE GMBH COMPANY HAS OPERATED WITH A COMPREHENSIVE HYGIENE CONCEPT THAT SETS STANDARDS FOR THE INDUSTRY. BBI DISCUSSED IT WITH CEO **WILHELM-PETER IHLE**



**++ figure 1**  
Alexander (left) and Wilhelm-Peter Ihle (right), CEO of Ihle

**+ bbi:** Mr. Ihle, two years ago you developed and launched a hygiene concept that was very comprehensive for a medium-sized business. Which specific targets did you associate with it, and to what extent have you been able to achieve the aims, or where did you have to make readjustments?

**+ Ihle:** The design and modular structure of the concept are such that all the needs of a foodstuffs manufacturing company can be sustainably adapted to present and future requirements, which makes it an integral component of an effective CIP principle (CIP = Continuous Improvement Program). That's why the continuous readjustment of a concept of this kind is also necessary, and is in the nature of things in a constantly changing process landscape. In relation to precisely these aims of our com-

pany, the German Food Standards Agency held an advanced training event for its members in April 2010, with a tour of our factory.

**+ bbi:** The concept is highly detailed and sophisticated. Could you please explain to us just the basic structures?

**+ Ihle:** The concept defines clear responsibilities through cleaning plans and building plans in conjunction with organisation diagrams and an establishment posts concept. Its basic principle is the avoidance of unclean situations during the process as well. The rule for all staff is: "We all ensure a constantly clean workplace!"

**+ bbi:** The concept for the hygiene status at a secure level has probably brought with it the

majority of the changes, both with regard to the procedures and organisation as well as the investments you have made for it. Can you tell us the basic principles of this concept?

**+ Ihle:** It was necessary to make the following changes:

- Personnel hygiene – artisan structures are insufficient – for example we think access exclusively through gated hygiene systems is a part of it
- Avoiding waste through unpacking raw materials before they enter the production plant
- Clear rules for product and production wastes; we have introduced a design with colour-coded containers for these
- Setting up a central hygiene centre to clean plant and equipment. For example, modern cleaning systems such as foam cleaning are an integral part of it
- Vermin control to the highest possible standards

**+ bbi:** There is a hygiene pyramid in this concept: rough cleaning, precision cleaning and special cleaning. At what frequency are these cleanings carried out, and who monitors each of them?

**+ Ihle:** The cleaning pyramid is divided into rough cleaning, which the employees must carry out constantly at their workplace, precision cleaning, which is carried out by specialised staff from the production and factory cleaning departments

and by external cleaning firms, and special cleaning, which includes dismantling production plants with technical maintenance by an interdisciplinary team from several departments. The efficacy is verified in weekly team meetings based on the levels of fulfilment of the plans, and arrangements are then also made for necessary measures such as investments. We have summarised everything that is important to us in relation to tidiness and cleanliness in a booklet for our staff.

**+ bbi:** How do you document all these activities and their execution, and the checking and possible complaints, without the mass of “paperwork” preventing the employees working?

**+ Ihle:** “Record it or else” is the right slogan. Documentary records are needed to enable us to prove the duty of care imposed on us as food manufacturers. Cleaning activities and checks that are carried out must be documented. Of course we are in the process of developing a computer-based system like we already use in vermin control, but that needs more time. We have not been convinced by the systems available on the market. We are currently collaborating with Bonn University to develop a computer-based system suitable for our circumstances.

**+ bbi:** Cleaning is something no-one likes doing. How did you succeed in changing employee awareness so that everyone ▶

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### The Landbäckerei Ihle Company, Augsburg

Augsburg, the district capital of Swabia in the state of Bavaria, is the home town of the Landbäckerei Ihle GmbH Company. The enterprise originated from a typical German artisan bakery founded in 1890 as an extension of the family's agricultural business. In the late nineties the family invested in an automated production line for bread rolls, thus positioning itself as a supplier to the food retail alongside the artisan bake-house supplying its own branches. Expansion of the network of branches followed. Today the number of Ihle-outlets has grown to 245.

Despite considerable growth Ihle still remains a family business. It is managed by the fourth generation brothers Wilhelm-Peter and Alexander Ihle. There are more than 2,700 employees on the payroll, 250 of them trainees. The Ihles inaugurated a state-of-the-art factory for the industrial production of pretzel style bread in the Augsburg suburb of Gersthofen in October this year, with a weekly production of 6m pretzel rolls and sticks and 4m bread rolls in various convenience levels, as well as 240 t of bread. This has created an additional 200 jobs in Gersthofen. +++

at all levels in the hierarchy regards it as part of their work rather than something that is delegated to subordinates?

**+ Ihle:** We make it clear in our training sessions that work to maintain the highest possible level of hygiene is just as important to us as work to achieve optimum product quality. This demand applies right across all the levels in the hierarchy. Our hygiene rulebook contains an easy to understand summary of all the important requirements that our employees must obey.

**+ bbi:** There's a mountain of new codes of conduct for all employees: no smoking, no jewellery, clothing, rules of behaviour – how can it all be enforced on a permanent basis? Is there a punishment catalogue?

**+ Ihle:** Compliance in each of the departments is checked in monthly hygiene inspection tours together with the production management and quality management department. The results are presented in a monitoring meeting together with the business management results, and the trends are tracked and discussed with those responsible for the departments and conclusions for actions drawn. There is a bonus system for the production manager and shift managers based on the results of the tours of inspection.

**+ bbi:** One of the concepts deals with the permanent avoidance of vermin. What does that mean apart from regularly setting mousetraps and moth traps?

**+ Ihle:** For us it means the computerised assessment of every bait station in a 14-day monitoring cycle, and collaboration with an accredited pest control company. We are one of the few food businesses in Germany that

has their pest controllers checked by a sworn expert consultant. This also includes an annual verification by neutral vermin control consultants of the actions taken, an additional qualification for the quality management staff as certified pest controllers and control officers, and the concept of creating barriers at doors and gates. Another important point is dealing with returned goods outside the production building.

**+ bbi:** Does the concept undergo constant further development, and how is this organised?

**+ Ihle:** Annual certification in accordance with the IFS at a high level is a precondition for being able to hold one's own in the market nowadays. That's why the constantly changing process landscapes on the one hand and the requirements applying to food businesses on the other call for such a concept to be kept continually in a control loop. Our quality management always introduces the DEMING control loop at this point. (William Edwards Deming, one of the founders of the modern idea of quality.)

**+ bbi:** After two years of practical experiences, can you give us an indication of what the new hygiene concept has cost you, and for example which costs can also be avoided through it?

**+ Ihle:** Because we do not look on expenditure for our hygiene and cleanliness costs separately from expenditure on production plant, for example, such statements are not helpful. We only know one thing, without this expenditure we would not be a partner of the food retail.

**+ bbi:** Mr. Ihle, we thank you for the interview. +++



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