

BEHIND THE SCENES



“We recycled more than 60,000kg of textiles last year” 23

Text: Anouk Bowman
Images: Anouk De Kleermaeker

Lamme Textile Management

SPICK AND SPAN

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR KLM BLANKET ONCE YOU LEAVE IT BEHIND AND CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY? WELL, THAT BLANKET GOES ON A JOURNEY TOO.

With 2.5 million passengers travelling with KLM each month, there's never a slow day at Lamme Textile Management, the company responsible for cleaning and maintaining KLM's textiles. Lamme has facilities in three locations: Schiphol Airport and Nederhorst den Berg in the Netherlands, and Frankfurt in Germany. I've just arrived at the Schiphol facility. “We clean almost all KLM textiles: napkins, blankets, uniforms and the overalls that the ground crew wear,” explains Mark van 't Klooster, Manager Operations Schiphol, while we walk down a hallway lined with supply trolleys, designed to roll down the plane aisle. Van 't Klooster turns to his colleague Johan Cornelisse, Chief Operations Officer, and asks, “Anything to add?” Cornelisse gestures towards some packages. “We also wrap the textiles in protective packaging,” he says.

About 90,000kg a week

Making my way between trolleys filled with Economy-Class blankets, I follow Cornelisse and Van 't Klooster to a huge factory floor that's divided into three halls. It doesn't surprise me to learn that 90 people are responsible for washing about 90,000kg of textiles a week here. We start our tour in Hall 1, where a team is busy sorting through napkins and blankets. “If a textile is no longer fit for use, it's recycled,” says Cornelisse. “We recycled more than 60,000kg of textiles last year. If a textile is still usable, it enters the cleaning process, which starts here. We take these blankets from the conveyor belt and then put them into bags. Once a bag weighs 42kg, it's unloaded into this washing machine. Lamme washes the blankets at 40°C rather than 60°C, which is better for the environment. To ensure that the quality of the

cleaning remains the same, we add a special disinfectant.” While I'm hovering over the machine, a splash of water startles me and serves as a cue for Van 't Klooster. “We reuse our water,” he says. “This water has been purified, so we can reuse it for a new load of laundry.”

The 'blanket hall'

Van 't Klooster points at a metal box in which the blankets are collected. “Once they've been cleaned, our blankets are dried here in Hall 2, the 'blanket hall,’” he says. “Then they're put into the folding machine, which can fold up to 600 blankets an hour.” A little further down, I see employees dropping the blankets onto a conveyor belt. “And then this sealing machine wraps them in plastic packaging.” Plastic might not sound like the most sustainable choice, but in the case of these blankets it is. “We use packaging that's made of thin, light recycled plastic, which helps to reduce the weight of the aircraft and, ultimately, the amount of CO₂ that KLM's aircraft emit,” adds Cornelisse. “Lastly, the uniforms are processed in Hall 3.”

More than 25 nationalities

When it comes to its personnel, Lamme likes to help the disadvantaged while embracing diversity. “Around half of our employees have trouble finding work,” says Van 't Klooster. “This might be because they have a disability, for instance. We give them an opportunity, we want them to learn and grow.” I ask if managing such a diverse group of people is a challenge. Cornelisse responds to my question while waving at a gentleman pushing a cart. “Despite having more than 25 nationalities, we all have the same mentality,” he says. “Some even arrive early to have a coffee and chat with colleagues.”



Above Johan Cornelisse, Chief Operations Officer (left) and Mark van 't Klooster, Manager Operations Schiphol
Left page Some of the textile-cleaning phases at Lamme Textile Management at Schiphol Airport