


# Laundry Rooms

This Guidance highlights some of the hazards associated with operating laundry rooms and the steps that can be taken to reduce or mitigate them.

## RISK ADVICE LINE

Having read this guidance should you have any additional questions on this topic or other risk related matters, as a valued Ecclesiastical customer you can contact our Risk Management Team on 01 619 0300 (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, excluding bank holidays)

For queries about your policy cover or claims please contact your insurance broker.



Many organisations including schools, colleges, nursing homes, hotels and restaurants operate in-house laundry facilities for the cleaning of clothing, bedding, towels, table cloths, cleaning cloths etc.

There are a number of risks associated with laundry operations including fire, water damage and health and safety, which if appropriately identified and managed can be greatly reduced or even avoided.

This guidance is aimed at general laundry facilities involving washing, drying, pressing and ironing. It does not cover dry cleaning operations.

Guidance on dry cleaning is available from the Health and Safety Executive in the UK (HSE) on <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg310.pdf>

## Fire risks in laundry rooms

Laundry rooms are often considered to be wet process areas with a low fire risk, however, fires in laundry facilities do happen on a regular basis. Laundry fires can occur for a number of reasons, including electrical faults, the ignition of lint build up in tumble drying machines, and from "spontaneous combustion" of laundry that has not been thoroughly cleaned, which is then dried and packed or stacked whilst still hot.

Chefs' whites, aprons and tea towels are often impregnated with cooking oils which can self-ignite if they are not fully cleaned, and are then dried and stored without allowing sufficient time to cool. The same principle applies to towels and bedding etc. contaminated with organic oils used in health suites and spas.

In order to minimise the risk of a fire in your laundry room, you should:

1. Ensure wash temperatures and detergents are suitable for the removal of all fats, grease and oils likely to be encountered
2. Train laundry staff to be aware of any residual smells, especially oily, fatty odours on processed items and to return them for re-wash if still contaminated
3. Allow laundry to complete the cooling cycle in the dryer (do not remove items early)
4. Ensure stacks or piles of laundry are well ventilated
5. Don't place warm damp laundry in polythene bags or containers in poorly ventilated areas
6. Clean lint filters and traps after **every** use
7. Never leave laundry appliances running unattended or overnight
8. Do not overload the laundry appliance
9. Ensure heated presses and irons are not left unattended and are switched off when not in use
10. Appliances must be electrically tested and serviced regularly by a qualified engineer
11. Ensure staff are fire trained and know not only where the fire extinguishers are but which type they should use for the different types of fire
12. Laundry rooms should be of fire resisting construction and be fitted with a self-closing fire door. Fire doors must never be jammed open
13. Automatic fire detection should be provided in the room
14. Review your fire risk assessment to include the laundry room
15. Ensure the laundry room is adequately ventilated as these rooms can become very hot .

Further fire safety guidance is available free from the RiscAuthority website:

[RC58 – Recommendations for Fire Safety in Laundries](#)

## **Water damage risks in laundry rooms**

Every year, tens of millions of Euro of water damage to property and disruption to business activities is caused as a result of escape of water from pipework and systems. Laundries of course use significant quantities of water in their process and are therefore more susceptible to water damage losses. The majority of losses occur through faulty joints or poorly installed pipework and connections e.g. using jubilee clips on hoses instead of screw fixings for connections. If the loss occurs overnight or when the premises are unoccupied a significant amount of water can escape causing extensive damage. Similarly if the laundry room is located on an upper floor of a building any escape of water could lead to damage to floors below.

The extent of damage can be considerably reduced if water supplies can be isolated quickly or water leaks detected at an early stage.

Although your maintenance and laundry staff may have good knowledge of where underground shut off and stop cock valves on rising mains are located, In order to minimise escape of water losses in your laundry room, you should:

1. Carry out regular inspections of all pipework, hoses and connections to check for signs of deterioration / wear.
2. Ensure that hose connections are screwed connections rather than just jubilee clips
3. Display 'mains shut off valve' or 'stop cock valve' signs in or adjacent to laundry rooms to indicate where these are located and ensure staff know where these are located, a 'schematic' plan can be useful to assist in identifying the location of these
4. Consider the location of the laundry room within the building, ideally it should be on the ground floor
5. Consider the installation of water leak detection systems in any area where it is considered that the extent of any damage following an escape of water is likely to be severe. These systems can identify a water leak at the early stages and can incorporate automatic shut off valves to stop the leak.

Further advice on how to manage escape of water risks is available from our [website ecclesiastical.ie/documents/reduce-water-leaks.pdf](http://www.ecclesiastical.ie/documents/reduce-water-leaks.pdf)

## Health and safety in laundry rooms

Below are some of the common hazards associated with laundries, however the list is not exhaustive. Completing a risk assessment will help you to identify the hazards in your laundry room. More importantly, it will help you decide on suitable precautions given your particular circumstances. In some cases, you may need to complete more specific risk assessments to meet your legal duties. An example would be a manual handling task that presents a significant risk of injury.

## Occupational ill-health risks in laundry rooms

### Manual handling

Poor work design in laundries can lead to staff having to adopt awkward postures when handling laundry and loading or unloading machines. Awkward postures include bending, reaching, stooping and twisting. These are commonly attributed to a lack of adequate space, machines and shelves positioned either too high or low, and faulty, unsuitable or inadequate equipment such as trolleys and laundry bags. The handling of trolleys can result in injury too. Some injuries can be instant, such as crush injuries from overbalancing of equipment, but health issues such as slipped discs can be cumulative and sometimes only appear once the damage has been done.

In order to minimise manual handling injuries, you could:

1. ensure your laundry is well organised with work areas arranged so people do not have to adopt awkward postures or move loads further than absolutely necessary
2. provide the right type of lifting aids – such as trolleys - to reduce the physical strain on people who have to lift and carry loads
3. maintain and check lifting aids regularly to ensure they are in good working order
4. keep walkways in good condition
5. inspect floor surfaces regularly, so any spillages can be promptly cleaned up
6. carry out manual handling assessments where there is a significant risk of injury – your general risk assessment for the laundry environment will help you identify this
7. provide suitable training to staff in how to lift and move things safely in your laundry, and in the use of any lifting aids

For further advice on manual handling risks visit our website

<https://ecclesiastical.ie/documents/manual-handling.pdf>

### Work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs)

WRULDs are soft tissue disorders which can affect the hands and fingers, wrists, arms, shoulders and neck. Symptoms can include pain, swelling, difficulties gripping, and moving. Examples include Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, and tennis elbow. Some conditions can result from prolonged, repetitive movements. Poorly designed layouts or workstations and poor job design in laundries can lead to workers having to adopt uncomfortable or awkward postures adding to the risk. Carrying out tasks that require gripping or applying pressure for too long or with too much force, along with carrying out repetitive sorting and packing work can also increase the risk. In order to minimise WRULDs, you could:

1. ensure your laundry room is well organised with work stations etc. arranged at the correct height and position so workers do not have to adopt uncomfortable or awkward postures when using them
2. ensure staff avoid prolonged repetitive work, particularly using the same hand or arm actions such as gripping, twisting and squeezing
3. minimise tasks which require sustained or excessive force such as using equipment or work items creating concentrated pressure on any part of the upper limb, including pressure from a trigger or button – for example when ironing
4. improve the working environment (cold temperatures and draughts can contribute to discomfort)

For further advice on WRULDs and a simple risk filter to help you identify jobs that are worth looking at in more detail, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the UK has produced a guide. This can be found at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg171.pdf>

## Contact dermatitis

Laundry detergents or regular contact with water can trigger a condition called contact dermatitis, which is a skin disease caused by work. It develops when the skin's barrier layer is damaged. This leads to redness, itching, swelling, blistering, flaking and cracking. The most susceptible parts of the body are the hands. Sometimes the consequences of contact are immediately visible, but not always and it is important to be aware the effects can be cumulative.

In order to minimise contact dermatitis in your laundry area you could:

1. where possible make sure that staff avoid contact with substances that cause these conditions – e.g. install automatic dosing or provide utensils for handling detergents
2. where your risk assessment shows frequent contact cannot be avoided, provide staff with appropriate protective clothing and gloves, and suitable information and training
3. ask staff to regularly check their skin for early signs of dermatitis. Symptoms should be reported to a supervisor, as treatment is much more effective if dermatitis is caught early
4. provide moisturiser for workers' hands to replenish the skin's natural oils

Further advice on contact dermatitis is available from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) at <https://www.hsa.ie>

## Slip and trip risks in laundry rooms

Many factors can cause slips and trips in laundry rooms. Some of the main ones include wet or slippery surfaces caused by spillages of fluids and water; slippery surfaces caused by dry or dusty floor contamination such as lint; uneven surfaces and changes in floor levels e.g. unmarked ramps, poor levels of housekeeping with obstructions in walkways and inadequate levels of lighting.

In order to minimise slips and trips in your laundry area you could:

1. clearly mark where floor levels change, so these are clearly visible
2. decide how, when and how often floors should be cleaned and how spillages can be quickly and effectively dealt with to prevent floors getting contaminated
3. design tasks to minimise spillages and, if they cannot be prevented, control the contamination from detergents, water etc., e.g. by containing and effective cleaning. Slip-resistant flooring could be used where surface contamination cannot be effectively controlled.
4. ensure floors and access routes are kept free from trip hazards and obstructions, e.g. deliveries are stored away promptly, rather than left in walkways
5. where your risk assessment shows that despite your controls, there remains a risk of slips and trip injuries, consider providing staff with suitable footwear for the environment.

For further advice on slip and trip risks visit our website <https://www.ecclesiastical.ie/risk-management/preventing-slips-and-trips/>

## Burns and scalds in laundry rooms

Burns and scalds are commonly caused by steam, hot liquids and contact with hot surfaces such as irons. The risk of injury may be reduced by:

1. arranging laundry layout so irons and steamers are used in areas well away from other workers, and where users will not be accidentally knocked when ironing/steaming
2. training staff in the safe use of equipment
3. using equipment on suitable and stable surfaces
4. ensuring equipment is left to cool after use before being put away
5. maintaining equipment regularly and visually inspecting it before each use
6. labelling any very hot water taps with warning signs to alert staff

## Work Equipment in laundry rooms

Any equipment which is used by staff in your laundry such as washing machines, dryers, trolleys, step ladders, irons and ironing machines and steamers needs to be safe.

In order to meet legal requirements, you should ensure equipment is:

1. suitable for use, and for the purpose and conditions in which it is to be used
2. maintained in a safe condition for use so that people's health and safety is not at risk
3. inspected in certain circumstances, to ensure that it is and continues to be safe for use. Any inspection should be carried out by a competent person (this could be an employee if they have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to perform the task) and a record kept until the next inspection
4. provided with any necessary safeguards and controls (e.g. guards, emergency stop devices, clearly visible markings, warning devices etc.).

You may also need to introduce other measures such as a safe system of work (e.g. ensuring maintenance is only performed when equipment is shut off etc.), or providing adequate information, instruction and training for staff about the specific equipment. A combination of these measures may be necessary depending on the requirements of the work, your assessment of the risks involved, and the practicability of such measures

## Hazardous substances in laundry rooms

Some cleaning detergents can cause skin irritation, burns or eye damage. Lint can also cause respiratory irritation to staff. Occasionally staff may come into contact with hazardous substances because laundry is contaminated, particularly in care settings.

In order to minimise contact with hazardous substances in your laundry area, you could:

1. use less harmful products where these are available
2. use liquid detergent formulations rather than powder
3. ensure that where possible staff avoid pouring detergents and chemicals by providing measured-volume dispensers if possible
4. make sure there are suitable arrangements in place for the safe handling, storage and laundering of contaminated laundry.
5. clear out the tumble drier dust filters at the beginning, middle and end of each shift
6. make sure there is a good standard of general ventilation
7. provide suitable handwashing facilities inside the laundry room
8. ensure that where your chemical assessments show that despite your controls, there remains a risk from hazardous substances, consider providing staff with suitable protective clothing and equipment

## Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available at [www.ecclesiastical.ie/risk-management/](http://www.ecclesiastical.ie/risk-management/).

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