

## Competition Makes Misleading Claims, Says Kärcher CEO Jenner

Detergents: should we use them or not? Cleaning machinery manufacturers Kärcher and Tennant are now engaged in court proceedings about whether ordinary water is enough to do the cleaning. Kärcher CEO Hartmut Jenner is interviewed about misleading claims.

### **WirtschaftsWoche: Are you a bad loser, Mr. Jenner?**

Hartmut Jenner: No, why?

### **Because you want to have your competitor Tennant banned from claiming that its so-called ec-H2O technology makes adding detergent unnecessary. Why do you not leave it to the market to decide the issue?**

Tennant's claims are simply misleading. The so-called ec-H2O technology may break down oxygen-enriched water in an electrolytic cell into alkaline and acid components, but the process is not a stable one. The ionised water reverts to ordinary water within nanoseconds. What finds its way onto the surface to be cleaned cleans no better than ordinary tap water does and not, as Tennant claims, like a powerful detergent.

### **Yet Tennant machines do clean, don't they? Otherwise the customers would bombard Tennant with complaints.**

We are not disputing that pure water is an outstanding cleaning agent. We even advise our customers to use only water for certain applications. But when the soiling is fatty, you will soon come up against limits with water. You then need additional tensides – agents that modify water tension with which everyone is familiar from domestic washing or cleaning.

### **So what Tennant offers with its ec-H2O technology is strictly esoteric, then?**

The word you have just used is not one that you will hear from me in this connection.

### **Is that because your lawyers have advised you to avoid the word esoteric?**

That's right.

### **What do you want to achieve by taking Tennant to court?**

Above all to stop the company from making the false assertions mentioned. But we have more in mind. As the market leader we are concerned about the image of the entire industry if claims of this kind go undisputed. It is also a matter of being fair to the customer. There is no such thing as a TÜV or independent agency that tests the efficacy of cleaning machinery. Customers must be able to rely on the claims that manufacturers make.

### **Have you lost market shares as a result of the Tennant campaign?**

No, last year was the best year in our history across the Group, and sales rose by over 20% in the scrubber-drier segment in which Tennant offers its ec-H2O technology.

### **When are you expecting a ruling?**

That could take until next year. We have initiated legal proceedings first in Belgium – because Tennant's European headquarters are in Antwerp – and in our own home country Germany. In addition we have called on the authorities in the UK to take action against the misleading claims. In the UK there is no civil law complaints process for cases of this kind. We reserve the right to take legal action in other countries, including the United States.

### **The Plaintiff**

*Jenner, 46, studied at the University of Stuttgart before joining Kärcher as assistant to the director in charge of Finance and Human Resources. He went on to become head of Accounts. In 2000, engineering and business studies graduate Jenner was appointed as Managing Director and a year later as Chairman of the Kärcher Group's Management Board.*