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Protection of valuable resources implemented in science and practice

DBU's German Environmental Award goes to the scientist Prof. Peter Hennicke and the businessman Prof. Gunther Krieg – honorary award for Hubert Weinzierl

The prizewinners have been announced for the German Environmental Award bestowed by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU). The economist and energy-efficiency expert Prof. Peter Hennicke (72, Wuppertal) and Prof. Gunther Krieg (72, Karlsruhe), scientist and founder of the company UNISENSOR Sensorsysteme, will receive the 500,000-euro award, the most lucrative in Europe, from German President Joachim Gauck in Kassel on 26 October. "Both have been working for decades on saving energy and protecting valuable resources with extraordinary commitment, even if they pursue the goals of achieving efficiency in the use of energy, resources and materials in very different ways: Hennicke as a scientist and recognised expert on sustainable energy supply, and Krieg as a successful developer and businessman in the field of internationally unique measuring and analysis systems that open perspectives for a sustainable future," DBU General Secretary Dr. Heinrich Bottermann said today. Hubert Weinzierl (78, Wiesenfelden) is to receive the DBU's honorary award, which has been presented only three times up to now, for his lifelong commitment to the conservation of nature.

Hennicke created scientific basis for a successful transition to renewables in Germany

"Hennicke is a recognised scientist and expert on sustainable energy supplies who has been active for decades. With extraordinary commitment and scientific competence, he has worked successfully on transforming the energy system on ecological principles, saving energy, and making it economically feasible to have an energy supply derived entirely from renewable sources," Bottermann said. Hennicke, an economist and professor for economic policy and energy economy, has been or remains active on all levels, he said: in an interdisciplinary capacity in the field of science, as an economic and political consultant, and as a source of information for the public. According to Bottermann, he has made a decisive contribution to creating the scientific basis for the transition to renewables in Germany, and to furthering the political implementation of this transition. Bottermann especially emphasised the revamp, carried out under Hennicke's leadership, of the research programme at the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, which researches and puts into practice sustainable strategies. From an early date, Hennicke had been convinced that changes in values and behaviour, social acceptance, technological developments, legal practicability and the right government framework all had to come together if the energy transition was to succeed, Bottermann said.

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Krieg “set milestones in integrating production and environmental conservation”

Speaking of the prizewinner Krieg, Bottermann praised him for turning his vision of curbing the worldwide squandering of valuable resources into reality with his “internationally unique measuring and analysis systems.” He described how Krieg had investigated the optical analysis of materials during his scientific career at the University of Applied Sciences in Karlsruhe. Even before the founding of UNISENSOR in 1990, Krieg had realised projects involving the transfer of technology from the scientific to the practical field at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology and the Steinbeis Innovation Center Optoelectronics and Sensors, which he has headed since 1980, according to the DBU General Secretary. The technologies he has developed are “milestones in the integration of production and environmental conservation. Using his revolutionary procedures, valuable synthetic materials can be recycled at a higher quality, so that, for example, chemicals employed in offset printing can be measured out much more precisely, allowing a reduction in the amount consumed – greatly easing the burden on the environment and offering a promising perspective for the future,” Bottermann said. He described how Krieg, with his technological flair and passion for new developments, had made a major contribution to reducing the wasteful consumption of mineral oil, a finite resource, and to enhancing the efficiency of materials.

Weinzierl as a leading personality in nature conservation in Germany

Turning then to Weinzierl, the winner of the Honorary Award and president of the German League for Nature and Environment, Bottermann said: “Weinzierl is a pioneer and visionary. He is one of the very few of our contemporaries to have brought organised nature conservation out of its niche into the centre of our society. For many he is the most high-profile conservationists in Germany and someone who integrates traditional nature conservation with modern environmental policies.” Throughout his life, Weinzierl had been actively involved in the conservation movement, displaying great moral courage, Bottermann said. According to the DBU General Secretary, Weinzierl was not a leading figure, but the leading figure in German nature conservation, setting major trends with regard to sustainability, responsibility for nature and the protection of diversity. A particularly important phase in his exceptional commitment was the founding of the national park in the Bavarian Forest, to which he made a decisive contribution, and his involvement in creating the first environment ministry in Bavaria, Bottermann said. Bottermann went on to praise what he called Weinzierl's exemplary efforts as longtime chairman of the DBU's Board of Advisors in promoting education on the environment, a sustainable lifestyle and practical species conservation.

Note to the press: detailed commendations of the prizewinners, their CVs, audio material and photos for free publication at www.dbu.de