

26th october 2014

German Environment Award goes to excellent efficiency experts

DBU honoured the economist Hennicke and the entrepreneur Krieg – German president presented the awards – honorary award to Weinzierl

The German Environmental Award of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) has been presented for the 22nd time. The economist and energy-efficiency expert Emer. Prof. Peter Hennicke (72, Wuppertal) and the scientist and founder of the company UNISENSOR Sensorsysteme, Prof. Gunther Krieg (72, Karlsruhe), today received the award, the most lucrative independent environmental prize in Europe, from the hands of German President Joachim Gauck. With the presentation, the DBU has recognised the decades of exceptional commitment that the prizewinners have devoted to saving energy and protecting valuable resources. The additional honorary award of the DBU, which has only been presented three times so far, went to Hubert Weinzierl (78, Wiesenfelden) for his lifelong commitment to nature conservation.

The prizewinners had pursued their goals of achieving efficient use of energy, resources and materials in very different ways, DBU Secretary-General Dr. Heinrich Bottermann said at today's presentation ceremony: "Hennicke as a scientist and recognised expert for a sustainable energy supply, Krieg as a successful businessman and developer of unique measuring and analysis systems that open up perspectives for a sustainable future."

The DBU underlined how Hennicke – an economist and professor for economic policy and energy economy – had worked successfully, with exceptional commitment and scientific competence, to help restructure the energy system on an ecological basis, save energy and establish the economic viability of an energy supply derived entirely from renewables. He had made a major contribution to creating the scientific basis for Germany's transition to renewables and its political implementation, the DBU said. It described how the the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy's research programme, which focuses on the implementation of strategies for sustainability, had been revamped under his leadership

Bottermann went on to praise how the other prizewinner, Prof. Krieg, had turned his vision of stemming the worldwide wastage of valuable resources into reality with his unique measuring and analysis systems. He related how Krieg had studied the optical analysis of substances during his academic career at the Karlsruhe University of

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Applied Sciences (HsKA) and founded UNISENSOR in 1990. The technologies he had developed were milestones in the integration of environmental protection with industrial production, Bottermann said. With his revolutionary procedures, he said, valuable plastics could be recycled at a high level of quality and chemicals in offset printing could be measured out much more precisely and thus saved, for example. Krieg's technological flair and his passion for new developments meant that he had made a major contribution to reducing the wasteful consumption of finite resources such as mineral oil, and to increasing material efficiency, according to the Secretary-General.

The DBU praised the winner of the honorary award, Hubert Weinzierl, as a pioneer and visionary, and as one of the very few people to have brought organised nature conservation out of its niche to take up a central position in society. For many people, the DBU said, he was considered to be the most prominent conservationist in Germany and a figure representing the integration of traditional nature conservation and modern environmental policies. Throughout his life, Weinzierl, the honorary president of the German League for Nature, Animal Protection and Environment (DNR) and the honorary chairman of BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany), had engaged in the nature conservation movement with great moral courage, it said. According to the DBU, he was not just one of the leading personalities in nature conservation in Germany, but the leading personality, and had set important trends with regard to sustainability, responsibility for nature and the protection of species diversity. His many years as the chairman of the Board of Advisors of the DBU were characterised by his promotion of education about the environment, a sustainable lifestyle and practical species protection.

The prizewinners themselves explained their stances and attitudes in films screened during the ceremony. Henniske stressed his concerns about climate change, which, he said, had developed in a way he had only ever experienced in nightmares. If we do not manage to change course in the next ten to 20 years, "we as humanity will be facing fairly catastrophic aspects". On the other hand, this "concerned optimist" proudly pointed out that the vision of a tiny minority – Germany's transition to renewable energy sources – was no longer stoppable. Although today's generation had somewhat higher costs, he said, "our children and grandchildren will reap the benefits", because the risks of atomic power and the dependence upon oil, for example, had been removed. Henniske said he wanted to see a "radicality of thought" that allowed the economic system to be developed to become "more just and more ecologically compatible", in the interest of the generations to come and of emerging and developing countries. Innovative technologies could make a big contribution here and show "that the more ecological solution can well be the cheaper one," he said.

Krieg underlined his vision of wanting to help to conserve the earth's resources with the technologies he has developed and through the many fields in which his sensor systems can be used. He explained, for example, that if one of his "sniffers" allowed the same bottle to be reused about twenty times, the raw resource oil was protected and the environment was put under much less strain. This was possible and also made

economic sense – it just had to be done, he said. For, he stated, “anything that is not economically viable doesn't work, because no one does it.” The impact on the greenhouse effect was enormous as well, according to Krieg. If his machines recycled around 700,000 tonnes of plastic worldwide, that was “as if I were to take 700,000 cars off the street so that their greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide no longer enter the atmosphere.”

In his film, Honorary Award winner Hubert Weinzierl explained how he realised after the end of the Second World War that humanity was still engaged in a “dark war”: a war against creation. For this reason, he said, he had become involved in nature conservation, which “to me has become a question of love. And if you have fallen in love with the world, creation, living creatures, then you don't ever give up.” As a “pathological optimist”, he said, it did him good when the number of those who realise that things can't go on like this grows. Weinzierl: “It continues to grow – and that's what gives me hope.”

Background information: The German Environmental Award of the DBU – the most lucrative independent environmental prize in Europe, worth 500,000 euros – is being awarded in 2014 for the 22nd time. It honours the achievements of people who have contributed to the protection and preservation of the environment in an exemplary fashion or who will help in future to reduce the burden on the environment in some major way. The prize can be awarded to projects, particular environmental measures or for a person's lifetime achievement. Employers' federations and unions, church, environmental and nature conservation groups, scientific associations and research communities, media, trades and marketing associations are all eligible. Self-nominations are not possible. A jury appointed by the DBU Board of Advisors, consisting of independent outstanding experts from the fields of business, science, technology and social groups, recommends the prizewinners for the respective year to the Board. The Board of Advisors then takes the final decision. The DBU Honorary Award, which is presented only sporadically, has so far gone to only three people: Mikhail Gorbachev, Professor Hannelore “Loki” Schmidt (†) and Professor Heinz Sielmann (†).