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“Power women” receive German Environmental Award for “women power”

DBU selected eco-insulation producer Hock-Heyl and “electricity rebel” Sladek as winners – German president presented

Osnabrück. The German Environmental Award of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) has been presented for the twenty-first time. The founder and managing director of the company Hock (Nördlingen), Carmen Hock-Heyl (58), and the chairwoman of the board at Netzkauf Elektrizitätswerke Schönau (EWS), Ursula Sladek (67), received the prize – the most lucrative environmental award in Europe – in Osnabrück today from the hands of German President Joachim Gauck. With the award, the DBU is acknowledging the prizewinners' ecological commitment and entrepreneurial courage in taking on challenges and successfully persevering in the face of great resistance. DBU Secretary General Dr. Heinrich Bottermann praised the way eco-insulation producer Hock-Heyl and “electricity rebel” Sladek had never ceased to pursue their visions of protecting the climate in a sustainable fashion, and had finally succeeded in realising them.

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Persuasive power based on expert knowledge and

Bottermann said these “power women” with “women power” had displayed courage, commitment, self-assertiveness, the preparedness to take risks and persistence in domains normally considered to be those of men. He said they had used expert knowledge and persistence to persuade others of the urgency of their ideas and to set in motion innovative ecological solutions. They had successfully reconciled ecological and economic considerations and were models for others, the DBU secretary general said.

Latest product from the company Hock completely

Bottermann described how Carmen Hock-Heyl had established insulation batts for house building made from the renewable raw material hemp on the market, prevailing in the face of much resistance and revamping the entire process from sowing the hemp and the

production of the batts to recycling. “Thermo-Hemp” products had been on the European market since 2006, Bottermann said, adding that, with its product “Thermo-Hemp Premium”, the company Hock was the market leader for insulation materials made from natural fibres. He explained that the company used naturally occurring alternatives such as sodium carbonate as fire retardants for all products, instead of ones on a chemical basis. He also noted that the company's latest product, “Thermo-Hemp Plus”, was completely biodegradable, and could be returned to the company for recycling free of charge when a house was torn down. Hock-Heyl had shown, he said, that sustainable climate protection with renewable raw materials could function successfully in the building industry.

Championed a safe and sustainable supply of energy after Chernobyl

Bottermann went on to describe how the other prizewinner, Ursula Sladek, began to champion a safe and sustainable energy supply after the Chernobyl reactor disaster. The green-energy supplier EWS was founded in 1994 on the basis of a citizens action group, he said. According to Bottermann, the “electricity rebel” , together with her fellow campaigners and the EWS, had prevailed over the obstacles put in their way by the then energy supplier and had taken over the Schönau power grid in 1997 in order to replace electricity from nuclear energy with electricity from renewable energy sources. Sladek had shown, Bottermann said, that public participation was important for bringing about change in energy policies and for climate protection. As early as 1999, one year after the electricity market was liberalised, she and her team in Schönau had begun supplying green electricity nationwide, he said. By founding the cooperative Netzkauf EWS in 2009, the EWS had given new impetus to the ecologically motivated cooperative movement in Germany, according to Bottermann.

Chernobyl catastrophe came “as a bombshell”

In films shown during the ceremony, the prizewinners made it clear how difficult their situation had been at the start. Ursula Sladek stressed that she was not particularly political or ecological to begin with, but had been “simply a worried mother with five children” for whom the nuclear catastrophe of Chernobyl came “as a bombshell”. Her goal had been to make Schönau a nuclear-free zone, she said. And because the local energy supplier operated a nuclear plant, she and other “courageous citizens” had wanted to found their own energy supply company on the basis of a citizens action group. In the end, they succeeded – despite massive attacks from the nuclear industry who saw its opponents as the problem, and not its own technology, she said.

Reservations and ignorance roused fighting spirit

Carmen Hock-Heyl also described how she had been laughed at for her goal of insulating houses ecologically with a renewable raw material that did not “itch and scratch” when being used, had no harmful effects and was recyclable. But, she said, that was exactly what roused her fighting spirit. She explained that hemp had many ecological advantages over other insulation materials. She said that it stored a lot of carbon dioxide while growing and did not release it again even when being recycled. In addition, she said, it was treated with naturally occurring sodium carbonate, which meant it did not give off any poisonous gases in the case of a fire. She said that because “Thermo-Hemp Plus” was made completely from renewable raw materials, it could be returned, reprocessed and reused after being used in a house that was torn down – unlike its synthetic competitors. Hock-Heyl said her vision was for natural construction materials to gain in importance and for consumers' prejudices against them to be broken down. Her product did not just protect the environment and health, “but is also the future”, she said.

Note to the press: Detailed individual commendations of the prizewinners, sound bites and free photos for publication are available at www.dbu.de

The German Environmental Award of the DBU is an independent award that at 500,000 euros is the most lucrative environmental prize in Europe. It was being presented in 2013 for the 21st time. Its purpose is to recognise achievements constituting an exemplary contribution to the protection and preservation of the environment or that will contribute to reducing the strain on the environment in some major way in the future. It goes to individual people, companies and organisations. The prize can be awarded for projects, particular environmental measures or a person's lifetime achievements. Candidates for the German Environmental Award are nominated to the DBU. Employer associations and unions, churches, environmental and nature conservation associations, scientific societies and research communities and trade and business associations are among those eligible to make such nominations. Self-nominations are not allowed. A jury appointed by the DBU Board of Advisors, consisting of independent and outstanding experts from business, science, technology and social groups, recommends prizewinners for the respective year to the Board. The Board then takes the final decision.