



German Environmental Award 2019: Personal Honor for Reinhard Schneider

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Mainz – "Through his personal engagement and corporate sustainability strategy, Reinhard Schneider has paved the way for environmental innovations with high standards for an entire industry. He has consistently made ecological products available in a mass market for the majority, considers sustainability in all corporate decisions and thereby earns the trust of consumers." With these words Alexander Bonde, Secretary General of the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU), today announced that the German Environmental Award 2019 goes to the owner of Werner & Mertz (Mainz), Reinhard Schneider (51). Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will present the award on 27 October in Mannheim. The prize money for Schneider is 250,000 EUR.



Reinhard Schneider, CEO Werner & Mertz GmbH Photo: Werner & Mertz

On new territory as "corporate pioneer"

A member of the fifth generation at the family-owned company, Schneider has been at the helm since 2000. Bonde pointed out that he elevated sustainability management to the chief executive level and anchored environmental concerns in the business strategy. With numerous initiatives for sustainable development and environmental protection, he entered new territory as a "corporate pioneer". The many achievements Bonde mentioned include: consistent recycling of used plastic from the Yellow Bag to make new packaging, environmentally friendly and health-conscious labels printed with sustainable inks, the use of regional vegetable oils instead of controversial palm or coconut oils from the tropics in laundry and cleaning products, and voluntary participation in environmental examinations for company compliance with European Union requirements. Schneider's pursuit of sustainability, said Bonde, is "apparent nationally and internationally". It can be seen, for example, in the company's main administration building which opened in 2010. Thanks to solar collectors, wind turbines and geothermal energy, the building produces more energy than it consumes for heating and cooling.

Plastic recycling in closed-loop system is a cause close to Schneider's heart



Motivated by the knowledge that it would be better to use plastic again and again rather than seeing it end up in the ocean or incinerated and released into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide after just one use, Schneider took up the cause of energy-saving plastic recycling within a closed-loop system. He knew that it takes a plastic bottle hundreds of year to disintegrate; what the tiny particles do to the environment and human life, however, is still unknown. Schneider does not accept that only a small portion of the plastic from the Yellow Bag can be recycled and used as material for other purposes – if only for the production of less complex products such as flower pots, park benches and boundary posts – and the rest burned as cheap fuel in large community waste-to-energy plants. Use of high-quality recycled plastic benefits the climate. Despite production costs for recycled plastic that are up to 20 percent higher, Schneider founded the Recyclate Initiative in 2012 with partners from industry, trade and Non-Governmental Organizations. He purposely did not seal off his company from others or keep special knowledge to himself. Bonde said, "Everyone can use and further develop the process in order to increase the number of recycled products quickly and establish them in the mass market. This is a good starting point for the development of a solution to our plastic problem." That's important because, according to a current study made by the Fraunhofer Institute for Environmental, Safety and Energy Technology, investments in plastic recycling pay off in the long term. Calculations made by the Fraunhofer researchers show that the use of high-quality recycled materials save more than 50 percent of climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions, compared to the use of new granules made from crude oil.



Photo: Werner & Mertz



One of the world's largest recycle bottle production facilities

Approximately 293 million bottles made of used plastic only – including caps – have been sold to date. Since July of this year bottles have been coming off the production line in the new Werner & Mertz Production Center, which likewise is keeping pace with sustainability requirements by means of photovoltaic systems for electricity generation, charging stations for electric cars and the use of recycled concrete. Bonde noted: "Schneider has created with his medium-sized enterprise one of the largest recycle bottle productions in the world." Because plastic recyclates from the Yellow Bag waste collection system are 20 percent more expensive than plastic from crude oil, the costly processing machinery yields good returns in the long run only at high utilization capacity. Extensive recycling at the same quality level pays off only if other manufacturers join in. "Recyclates are not inferior," said Bonde. "They are truly equal, but not everyone knows that yet."

Initiatives "will pay off in the long term both ecologically and economically"

The overall picture of the "pioneer of the circular economy" would not be complete without the information that since 2013 Schneider has relied on domestic vegetable oils as the raw material base in formulas for the umbrella brand Frosh products. Since 1986 the company has eliminated completely the use of substances from crude oil. Oils obtained from European cultivation of flax, hemp and olives are replacing environmentally critical alternatives made from palm oil from tropical regions. Although Schneider is a businessman involved in the manufacture of laundry and cleaning products, said Bonde, he embodies the "medium-sized company with stance", who "with his recognizable and unchanging attitude stands for environmental protection." Bonde added, "The initiatives brought to life by Schneider show that there is another way – and it will pay off both ecologically and economically in the long run."

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