

## “Taking the climate crisis seriously despite the COVID-19 pandemic”

German President symbolically presents German Environmental Award via video message

**Hannover/Osnabrück. Today (25 October 2020), the German Federal Environmental Foundation’s German Environmental Award, which has a remuneration of EUR 500,000, is being presented for the 28th time at the HCC Hannover Congress Centrum. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier is sending a clear signal with his remarks: despite the fact that he is currently in quarantine, he will be symbolically presenting the DBU Award – which is one of the richest in Europe – via video message that will be broadcast the event. DBU General Secretary Alexander Bonde says that the foundation felt extremely honoured by this demonstration of esteem. “This is a clear indication of the importance of this award – and of the fact that we need to continue to take the challenges of the climate crisis seriously on a political, societal, economic and scientific level, despite the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Bonde.**

This year’s German Environmental Award will be split between climate economist Prof Dr Ottmar Edenhofer and Annika and Hugo Sebastian Trappmann, with Edenhofer and the siblings each receiving EUR 250,000 in prize money. The German Federal Environmental Foundation will be presenting Dr Martin Sorg with an Honorary Award that comes with EUR 10,000 in prize money. Resource conservation will become a “key issue for a sustainable future for coming generations,” says the DBU General Secretary. Bonde continues: “We need to shift our thinking in the direction of cycles – from a circular economy that goes far beyond simply recycling our waste all the way to a circular society.”

*DBU wants to advance circular economy in Germany*

According to Bonde, everyone will need to “be on board” for this paradigm shift to work. “Only then can recycling and sustainability evolve into a feasible business model in the coming decades.” Bonde’s promise: “The German Federal Environmental Foundation will contribute tens of millions of euros in funding in the coming years in order to advance the circular economy in Germany.” He referred to the award winners as “pioneers for

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sustainability and resource conservation through research and entrepreneurship.”

***“An important tool to reduce greenhouse gases”***

Edenhofer (59), whose titles include Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), called the award “a great honour” – and “also an obligation: I will do everything in my power to ensure that carbon pricing schemes become an effective tool for climate protection.” The German Environmental Award serves as motivation “to do my part to guarantee the success of the European Green Deal currently being pursued by the EU.” Head of the Board of Trustees of the DBU Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, who is also Parliamentary Secretary of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, emphasized that with his approach to attaching a price to carbon emissions, Edenhofer has established “an important tool to reduce greenhouse gases” and therefore achieve greater climate protection. Schwarzelühr-Sutter: “His scientifically-backed findings have paved the way for the introduction of a CO<sub>2</sub> price for transport and new buildings as well.”

*Edenhofer: not a prophet, but a problem-solver*

In his own words, the PIK Director aims to be “not a prophet, but a problem-solver”. This is yet another reason why he sees the German Environmental Award as an acknowledgment of his efforts in the field of climate politics as part of an “anchoring of the climate economy in the field of science.” Dedication to climate protection could “never be a separate undertaking detached from either politics or from science”. Science must serve as the basis for political decision-making processes. Edenhofer: “The mainstream economy and mainstream society have to be on board.” Only then will it be possible to find solutions to fight climate change.

*Turning an entire company on its head*

The Trappmann siblings have also proven themselves to be effective problem-solvers. Their achievement: Annika (28) and her brother Hugo Sebastian (37) turned their entire company – the Blechwarenfabrik Limburg, which has around 320 employees – on its head with the construction of a new building at a different location and the goal of using digitalisation to conserve resources. Annika Trappmann: “For my brother Hugo Sebastian and myself as Managing Directors of Blechwarenfabrik Limburg, the German Environmental Award is both an honour and an incentive to blaze a trail for other small- and medium-sized enterprises with our project for greater energy and resource efficiency.” This kind of widespread impact would not be possible without the award, says the 28-Jährige. But this environmental award is much more than that: “it is an enormous acknowledgment and show of respect for the achievement of our 320 employees in Limburg.”

From Annika Trappmann’s perspective, the German Environmental Award is “a signal to SMEs in particular to find the courage to take risks”. At times, she may have “serious fears about the future” when she thinks about climate change, environmental protection and resource conservation. “However: I see so many great companies out there that can make a difference so that we can overcome these challenges.” One good example is the Germany-wide Association of Companies for Climate Protection, which was established roughly 10 years ago and in which Annika holds a seat on the Board. “This is a great initiative that also uses innovation and

ideas for greater climate protection to achieve a broad impact," says the 28-year-old.

*"From a bridge we can make a tin"*

Her brother is confident: Carbon-neutral manufacturing is already possible with the technologies available to us today. "We can and we must make this a reality," says Trappmann. The greater challenge facing humanity in the medium-term is the use of limited resources. But, like DBU General Secretary Bonde, Trappmann feels certain: "We need closed-loop material cycles." The 37-year-old continues: "Steel is not a molecule chain that gets shorter every time it is heated; it can be endlessly recycled. From a tin we can make a coffee pot, from a coffee pot we can make a bridge, and from a bridge we can once again make a tin." According to Trappmann, 80 per cent of the steel that has ever been produced "is still in our cycles."

*"Loss of biodiversity is caused by humans"*

Entomologist Dr Martin Sorg (65) is a true pioneer in his field. The DBU is recognising his achievements with an Honorary Award: as the leading researcher of the Entomologischer Verein Krefeld (Krefeld Entomological Society), he played a key role in the "Krefeld Study" – one of the first studies to scientifically substantiate the striking decline in insect biomass. Sorg: "There is no doubt about it that the scientifically proven loss of biodiversity is caused by humans." As a result, we human beings have an obligation: "It is now in our hands and it is our responsibility to determine where we are headed in terms of protecting biodiversity – in particular in terms of insects as the most species-rich group of animals," says Sorg.

The situation is extremely dramatic, says the entomologist. "We really need to take a hard look at this: In Germany, we assume that there are more than 34,000 different species of insects. But for more than 75 per cent of these insects, the actual threat level is currently unknown." This needs to change. Sorg's plea: "We need a much more comprehensive Red List that evaluates which species are at risk, endangered or extinct as the basis of our actions." It is "high time to readjust our priorities". Sustainable biodiversity protection in nature reserves must take precedence. Sorg: "We need to carefully examine the content of our laws, directives and regulations, review their implementation, and take a look at risk analyses for land use."

**Background information:** With the German Environmental Prize, which is being awarded in 2020 for the 28th time, the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) recognizes the achievements of individuals who have contributed to the protection and conservation of the environment in an exemplary way, or who will contribute to environmental relief in Germany in the future. The prize can be awarded for projects and individual measures, as well as to honour an individual's lifetime achievements. Candidates for the German Environmental Award are nominated to the DBU by groups such as employer's associations and labour unions, churches, environmental organisations and nature conservancies, scientific associations and research councils, as well as media, trade and commercial associations. Individuals may not nominate themselves. A jury of independent, prominent experts from the fields of industry, science and technology as well as from various societal organisations is selected by the DBU Board of Trustees and makes a recommendation on who they feel should be awarded the prize for that year. The DBU Board of Trustees then makes the final decision. Detailed information on this year's award recipients is available here: [https://www.dbu.de/123artikel38764\\_2442.html](https://www.dbu.de/123artikel38764_2442.html)

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