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The “sunny boy” of the solar industry through energy and passion

2012 German Environmental Award: Individual commendation of Günther Cramer, SMA Solar Technology AG

Kassel. “With his high technological achievements in photovoltaics, for more than 30 years Günther Cramer has pursued the vision of making possible a shift to a 100 percent decentralised energy supply from renewable sources. He wants to bring solar energy also to regions that are not connected to the power grid. By focusing consistently on research and development, Cramer, together with co-founders Peter Drews and Reiner Wettlaufer, has succeeded in turning the SMA from a small engineering consultancy into a globally active technology and market leader employing more than 5,500 people.” - This is how Dr. Fritz Brickwedde, the Secretary General of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU), today announced the presentation of the 2012 German Environmental Award of the DBU to the co-founder and supervisory board chairman of SMA Solar Technology AG (Kassel), Günther Cramer (59). Cramer will receive the prize from German President Joachim Gauck in Leipzig on 28 October. His prize money: 250,000 euros.

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“Talk and action have always been one and the same thing to him”

Brickwedde pointed out that the inverters developed by Cramer and his team have not only allowed easy installation, a great reduction in costs, maximum efficiency and the reliable operation of solar power plants, but were today the intelligent nerve centre of a photovoltaic system that enables solar current to be optimally integrated into grids. He commended Cramer for the great engagement with which he pursued his goal of promoting the industry and the expansion of photovoltaics (PV). Brickwedde: “Talk and action have always been one and the same thing to him, both in everyday business decisions and with regard to future global ecological issues.”

Interest in renewable energy sources is growing throughout the world

Brickwedde said that interest in renewable energy sources such as solar energy was growing throughout the world. In Germany, he said, PV was already providing more than 30 percent of power plant output on sunny days. Inverters played a central role in this, he said, as they converted the direct current that is produced into alternating current suitable for grids

and today also had to manage the highly complex tasks involved in integrating solar current into power grids. He said the goal of these developments was to be able to easily feed large amounts of solar energy into power grids by means of exact predictions of the expected solar power and through decentralised storage.

More than 5,500 jobs through innovations in environmental technology

With the development of the string technology, which was introduced in 1996 with the “Sunny Boy” inverters, SMA had made a major technological contribution to the success of PV, Brickwedde said. Now, small-scale professional tradesmen were for the first time able to plan their solar systems themselves, he said. SMA had also increased the efficiency of the inverters to the extremely high level of 99 percent using a series of new high-performance electronic solutions, he added. “Thirty years ago, SMA began as a pioneer in renewable energy. Today, the company is a technology and global market leader in the production of inverters, and more than 5,500 jobs have been created. Its innovative products cover the entire range – from small solar installations on private homes to solar-energy plants producing several megawatts,” Brickwedde said.

With “Sunny Boy” on the sunny side of the global market

Brickwedde explained how, as a pioneer in the development of renewable energy sources, Cramer realised early on that a close cooperation between business and research promoted technical innovations, making top technological achievements possible. Since the “Sunny Boy” string inverters were developed, he said, Cramer’s company, SMA, which for 20 years specialised in system technology for PV, has been on the sunny side of the global market for solar inverters.

Social engagement in developing countries

Brickwedde went on to say that Cramer had never lost sight of his vision of promoting renewable energy sources in developing and emerging nations, in which more than 1.3 billion people still lack access to electricity. He described how, on the basis of years of experience, SMA had developed the battery/inverter system “Sunny Island”, which makes possible a modular off-grid electricity supply in rural areas. Photovoltaic systems, wind farms or hydro-electric plants could be connected to these stand-alone grids, depending on the kind of energy available locally, he said, adding that thousands of stand-alone grids had already been set up in many developing countries on the basis of “Sunny Island” concepts.

Concepts and business models for promoting PV-based decentralised stand-alone systems

He also mentioned the charitable projects in which SMA staff had set up PV systems and stand-alone grids in healthcare centres or schools in countries such as Uganda and Madagascar, thus enhancing the quality of life for local residents. In 2011, he said, Cramer, together with SMA co-founders Drews and Wettlaufer, had established three foundations with

which they want to develop and support concepts and business models for promoting PV-based decentralised stand-alone systems. In addition, Brickwedde said, Cramer had worked intensively for many years on making the region of northern Hesse a nationally and internationally renowned centre for renewable energy sources with regard to application, research, development and production.

Exemplary corporate philosophy

As president of the German Solar Industry Association, Brickwedde went on, Cramer had also initiated the drawing up and implementation of a PV roadmap giving clear perspectives for the development of PV in Germany, which the industry can use for guidance and which also serves as basis for a constructive discussion at political level. Brickwedde said Cramer was also an example to other companies owing to his staff-oriented corporate philosophy. As part of a cooperative style of corporate leadership, SMA employees were involved in information and decision-making processes, had a financial share in the company's success, and were given continual further training. Additionally, Brickwedde said, Cramer attached great importance to using innovative energy technology in his company's own buildings. For example, he said, while building the SMA Solar Academy, Cramer had made sure the electricity supply came completely from renewable sources using an off-grid stand-alone system and that the world's biggest inverter factory used a carbon-neutral energy supply and efficiency technologies.

“Cramer has devoted his professional life to renewable energy sources”

Brickwedde: “With all his passion and his vision of an independent solar supply of energy across the world, Cramer has devoted his professional life to renewable energy sources. With his employee-oriented corporate philosophy and his ecological and social engagement in Germany and developing nations, he is a great example to other companies.”