



atomstromlos. klimafreundlich. bürgereigen.

EWS Schönau

Elektrizitätswerke Schönau – Who We Are

A citizens' electricity revolution

After the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in 1986, a parents' initiative against nuclear power was launched in the small town of Schönau in the German Black Forest region. Since the local grid operator had constantly obstructed related citizens' activities, which involved initiatives to save energy and to promote environmentally friendly power generation, local activists came up with the idea of acquiring the Schönau power grid to determine the conditions for its operation themselves. This anti-nuclear initiative stood firm and upheld its demand in two local referenda. Nor could the excessive, multi-million purchase price quoted by the incumbent prevent the activists from continuing their campaign. As a result, this civil-society initiative was the first of its kind in Germany, in 1997, to take over the grid as well as electricity supply to the local community. The press endearingly referred to them as the "Schönau electricity rebels" who "had won a David versus Goliath battle", and the victory of the Schönau people over nuclear lobbyists was met with much enthusiasm throughout the country.

When the German electricity market was deregulated in 1998, EWS was quick to seize the opportunity to supply all its Schönau customers exclusively with electricity generated from renewable and cogeneration sources. As a result, Schönau completely freed itself of power supplied from nuclear and coal-fired plants. EWS also launched comprehensive programmes to subsidise the installation of renewable energy and cogeneration systems. This is why the proportion of electricity from green sources supplied to Schönau has increased ever since. The EWS-operated grid handles a very high percentage of solar electricity as well as power being fed in from a large number of small cogeneration units.

Nationwide green electricity sales

One year later, in 1999, the liberalised German electricity market was opened up to private households. This is when EWS began to supply customers with green electricity on a nationwide scale. The way EWS is doing business has always been based on stringent environmental criteria that not only exclude the supply of electricity from nuclear and coal-fired power plants whilst, on the other hand, subsidising renewable energy systems but also aim to reduce electricity consumption and support the operation of climate-friendly cogeneration units. This comprehensive environmental concept has been the cornerstone of all Schönau activities since the Chernobyl disaster and is consistently being applied and improved by Elektrizitätswerke Schönau.

When it comes to sustainable and climate-friendly energy supply, the aspects of saving energy and increasing energy efficiency are getting more important by the day. The faster we succeed in reducing energy consumption from the currently very high levels in Western European countries, the sooner it will become possible to shift our energy system to 100% renewable sources.

Cogeneration, which is also known as combined heat and power (CHP), is another increasingly important building block in sustainable energy supply scenarios to promote energy efficiency. This is why EWS is subsidising the installation and use of small cogeneration units.

Advancement of green electricity generation

Approximately 160,000 electricity users in about 800 grid areas across Germany have chosen Elektrizitätswerke Schönau as their supplier. This is not only due to the environmentally driven approach to local grid operation and the clean electricity mix but also to the promotion of new, environmentally friendly generation units. More than 70% of the electricity sold by EWS is supplied by regenerative power plants that must not be older than six years. Furthermore, producers of electricity also invest in installing new units or expanding existing systems. In addition, EWS is subsidising new, green power generation units among its customer base. To date, about 2,600 units were supported in this manner, ranging from rooftop photovoltaic systems and cogeneration units to biogas and small hydropower plants. Decentralised generation creates jobs and growth within a sustainable economy and forms the basis for a system of sustainable energy supply.

EWS adds gas to its portfolio

In 2009, Elektrizitätswerke Schönau successfully applied for the Schönau gas grid concession and thus became the operator of the local gas grid and supplier of natural and biogas. Since then, customers not only in Schönau but also in the entire State of Baden-Württemberg have been able to choose EWS as their gas supplier. Since March 2015, EWS has been selling gas on a nationwide scale, and is currently serving more than 11,000 natural and biogas customers. Just like with electricity, a certain portion of the gas price is earmarked for subsidising green energy generation by customers. Biogas is produced in accordance with the stringent criteria defined by EWS.

New green generation units powered by EWS Energie GmbH

In August 2011, Elektrizitätswerke Schönau Energie GmbH was established as a new legal entity to complement the existing EWS subsidiaries. EWS Energie GmbH designs, funds, builds and operates environmentally friendly power generation units. As at year-end 2015, EWS Energie owned and managed an asset base comprising a total installed capacity of 5,892.96 kW, including 21 cogeneration plants (814.7 kW) and 19 PV systems (5,078.26 kWp). The generation portfolio is to be continuously expanded by wind and hydropower units as well as additional cogeneration plants. EWS was awarded the contract and got the approval for planning a wind farm on land owned by several neighbouring communities. These wind turbines are to be connected to the grid by the end of 2016. Local citizens' energy co-operatives should acquire shares in this wind farm. By this commitment, EWS intends to once again contribute to the transition to a 100% renewable energy system whilst providing its customers with the option of funding the installation of power plants by acquiring shares in the co-operative.

At the end of 2013, EWS Energie GmbH was complemented by Holzenergie Betriebsgesellschaft mbH (HBG), an entity to operate systems that generate energy from wood. EWS Energie GmbH has been relying on the expertise provided by HBG to design, build, fund and operate several heating networks in the southern Baden region that are primarily based on energy generation from regionally sourced wood residues and combined heat and power plants. Given the fact that a share of 40% in total final energy consumption can be attributed to heating, heating networks are an important building block towards achieving the transition of the energy system since they make it possible to intelligently interlink many environmentally friendly sources, including solar thermal energy, biomass and combined heat and power. The larger the number of people and households connected to heating networks, the greater the favourable environmental effects that can be achieved.

A growing co-operative

Netzkauf EWS eG, the Schönau co-operative, is also growing steadily: at the end of 2015, it had about 4,795 shareholders and paid-up capital shares in the total amount of €37 million. The EWS website at www.ews-schoenau.de includes links to forms and documents that can be downloaded to become a shareholder in the co-operative.

Political activities

The Schönau co-operative is not only working on implementing the German energy transition on a practical level but also pursuing a clear political agenda, including campaigns against nuclear energy such as “100 Good Reasons against Nuclear Power”, the campaign against granting massive subsidies to the construction of a new nuclear plant at Hinkley Point in the United Kingdom, and the campaign for the shutdown of the oldest French nuclear reactor at Fessenheim, to name but a few examples.

At the same time, EWS is constantly contributing to the current political debate over amendments to existing energy legislation whilst also proposing own drafts and boldly pursuing all available legal options up to the Federal Constitutional Court if and when required.

Dedication and motivational power

Elektrizitätswerke Schönau is more than just an electricity provider because its goals are much broader. EWS wants to encourage people to take matters into their own hands, to instigate change and to take action. Thus, our success is not only defined by the number of our customers or subsidised renewable generation units. What is immeasurable is the effect brought about by the dedication and motivational power that emanates from Schönau and instigates a large number of activities. The Schönau electricity seminars, for example, often attract people who share common goals and interests and join forces to plan and implement projects. This setting creates a constantly growing network of very active, environmentally driven initiatives.

And we practice what we preach – the guiding principles we are advocating as part of our political agenda also apply in-house: a photovoltaic system has been installed on the roof of the EWS headquarters to produce green electricity; this system is complemented by a cogeneration unit with a fuel cell, which was installed to generate both heat and electricity for our office building. We have also enlisted the service of a specialist contractor to insulate the listed building situated on our premises.

Prizes awarded to EWS

EWS has received many awards for its work. It is not only our shareholders and employees who are pleased about this appreciation. Our customers, too, are more than happy as they join EWS in its vision to create a fair and just, sustainable energy supply system free from nuclear power.

Prizes awarded to the Schönau energy initiatives:

- 2016 – Werkstatt N Award
- 2015 – International Economic Forum, Baden-Baden
- 2013 – German Environmental Prize
- 2011 – Goldman Environmental Prize
- 2010 – Querdenker®-Award (Lateral Thinkers Award)
- 2008 – Utopia Award
- 2008 – Ashoka Fellow – Social Entrepreneur
- 2007 – Deutscher Gründerpreis (German Business Founder Award)
- 2006 – Preis der Arbeit (Employment Prize)
- 2004 – Bundesverdienstkreuz am Band (Federal Cross of Merit)
- 2003 – European Solar Prize
- 1999 – Gutedelpreis (Gutedel Prize)
- 1999 – Nuclear-Free Future Award
- 1997 – Henry Ford European Conservation Award
- 1997 – Förderpreis „Demokratie Leben“ („Living Democracy“ Sponsorship Award)
- 1996 – Ökomanager des Jahres 1996 (1996 Eco-Manager of the Year)
- 1994 – Deutscher Energiepreis (German Energy Prize)

Figures as of December 2016

- Co-operative shareholders: 5 135
- Electricity customers: 164 462
- Natural and biogas customers: 12 781
- Employees : 110
- Subsidised sustainable generation units: approx. 2600