

Medienmitteilung

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“NanoAmbassadors” – an initiative by the German Museum in Munich with Empa’s participation

Experts set in motion nano-dialogues dealing with the potentials and risks of nanotechnology

Last Thursday the six “NanoAmbassadors“ in the German Museum in Munich were presented to the public. Among them is toxicologist Harald Krug, who since the beginning of this years chairs the Laboratory of “Materials- Biology Interactions” at Empa in St. Gallen, and there, researches, among others, the effects of different nanomaterials on human and animal cells and tissues. The „NanoAmbassadors“ – an initiative launched last year by the German Museum in Munich – are a group of scientists who have undertaken the task of informing the public about nanotechnology, and engaging in a dialogue through public discussions, experts’ lectures, exhibitions and other events, related to this topic.

Whether as a code word for custom-made materials with new characteristics, or as the logical next step of the miniaturization of (micro) electronics, or as a password into the world of atoms and molecules, “Nano” stands for a key technology in the 21st Century. Experts are sure that this new technology will soon have a pronounced influence and will bring about changes in products and procedures in many areas of our life. Due to the dimensions of the nano-cosmos – a nanometer is a millionth millimeter or the 50,000th part of the diameter of a human hair – nanotechnology remains nearly always invisible for its users.

In addition, the various and far reaching possibilities of this new technology while raising hopes, also cause uncertainties and fears. In order to take proper advantage of the future chances which nanotechnology certainly offers, and yet not ignore public fears, it is necessary to engage in an open, practical and well reasoned dialogue – a dialogue, which addresses possible risks openly, yet, at the same time also explains the use of the new technology and its economic potential, and instills in the public confidence about those who participate in nano-research.. The “NanoAmbassadors” want to set this dialogue in motion on all levels. At the German Museum for example, in the newly created „Center for New Technologies”, „Nano“ is a focal topic of interest for coming years. And Empa, for the second time, will organize the NanoConvention on June 28 and 29 this year, in the Kursaal in Bern, with the goal of strengthening the nano-dialogue further in Switzerland.

Empa researcher and „NanoAmbassador” Harald Krug is convinced that “only by improving our knowledge of nanotechnology and communicating this knowledge can society or the individual decide, to what extent the possible risks associated with nanotechnology are acceptable”. The task of the NanoAmbassadors is it to compile important knowledge and communicate it to the public, e.g. in the context of conferences like the

NanoConvention, and also at meetings with citizen groupings and consumer federations. To quote Krug: “I see the most important task of the NanoAmbassadors in the dissemination of this knowledge.”

Further information may be found at www.nanobotschafter.de and/or under www.nanoconvention.ch

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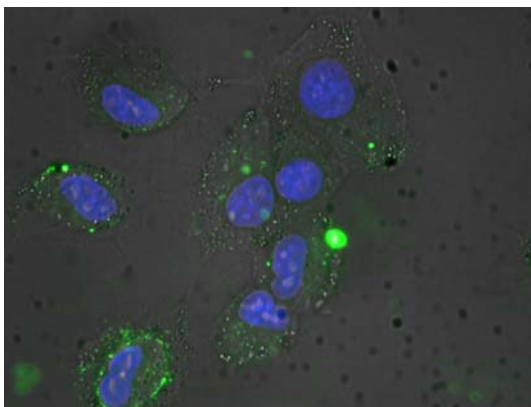
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Empa researcher and newly named «NanoAmbassador» Harald Krug (3rd from right) at the «Econsense», a public informational meeting about nanotechnology, which took place last year in Berlin.



Empa toxicologist Harald Krug researches with his team, among others, the effects of free nano-particles –in the picture green – on human cells (the cell core is blue colored; the picture was taken at the Karlsruhe Research Center where Krug was working till the end of last year).