

PRESS RELEASE

Helmholtz Center Berlin sets future course

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After some 60 years of successful neutron research in Berlin, research at the BER II reactor will officially cease by 2020

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At its June 25 meeting, the Helmholtz Center Berlin (HZB) board of directors made the decision to discontinue scientific operations at its BER II neutron source research reactor after January 1, 2020. “By giving everyone an early heads-up as to the projected date for the shut-down, we want to give BER II’s scientific users and the HZB directors the necessary reassurance to help them plan for a successful new focus of their research,” says Prof. Joachim Treusch, a member of the HZB board of directors. Treusch added that up until that point the BER II equipment, which was recently ranked exceptional in terms of quality, will continue to be fully available to its users.

Stresses HZB’s scientific director Prof. Anke Kaysser-Pyzalla: “The impending shut-down of BER II is an integral part of our future program, and both campuses – Wannsee and Adlershof – will play a central role in it.” Over the last few years, neutron source BER II has brought scientists from all around the World to Berlin. Its success has helped strengthen the excellent reputation of the HZB (or the Hahn Meitner Institute, which is what it was called prior to 2009). “From 2020 on, our focus will be on photon-based research and on expansion of our energy research program,” explains Kaysser-Pyzalla.

HZB investments over the last three years have helped ensure that external users and HZB scientists alike will meet with exceptional experimental conditions and that BER II will continue to remain fully operational and up-to-date till the very end.

Transforming the HZB into a cutting-edge energy research center with a focus on material research lies at the heart of the HZB future concept. “As a successful operator of large-scale scientific equipment, we will continue to refine the BESSY II photon source and, in the medium term, continue to move along plans for a successor model, BESSY III.” It’s possible BESSY III might get built on the Wannsee campus. Plans for building a new user facility in Wannsee, geared towards renewable energy researchers, are also being discussed.

Says Kaysser-Pyzalla: “Our photovoltaics thin-film technology has already helped make us one of the top locations in all of Europe. Going forward, we plan on continuing to hone this expertise.”

Last year, under Prof. Roel van de Krol’s leadership, the new HZB Institute for Solar Fuels was founded. And in August of this year, construction of EMIL (short for Energy Materials In-Situ Laboratory Berlin), an internationally unparalleled energy research lab, will commence at photon source BESSY II.

One future goal, in collaboration with the Max Planck Society, is to use X-ray analytics to study photovoltaics materials for use in photocatalytic processes. As soon as the BESSY II expansion project is done, this would uniquely allow for the merger of material production with ultraprecise film property analysis without disturbing the vacuum needed for synthesis.

Anke Kaysser-Pyzalla is certain that by investing in the future the Helmholtz Center Berlin will become one of the top motors behind the energy transition. “We’ve got all of the necessary technologies to conduct solid basic science research at our disposal. At the same time, we are looking at how the findings from this research might be implemented technologically. Plus, our staff is superbly trained, highly motivated, and deeply committed to conducting cutting-edge research.”