In memoriam Ekkehard Recknagel (1931–2009)

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Ekkehard Recknagel was an important pioneer in the fields of hyperfine interactions and cluster physics. On 8 June 2009 he died in Konstanz after a 20 years long battle against cancer.

Born in Halberstadt, Saxony-Anhalt, on 7 April 1931, Ekkehard started studying physics in 1951 at the University Göttingen and changed in 1953 to the University Heidelberg. In 1957 he earned his Diploma degree there under the supervision of Professor Hans Kopfermann. In 1940 Kopfermann had published his famous book on “Kernmomente” (nuclear moments) and he embossed Ekkehard’s life-long interest in hyperfine interactions. In 1960 Ekkehard finished his PhD at the same institute. His scientific career continued with an assistant professorship at the University Karlsruhe, where he worked at the institute for high-frequency technology and electronics under Professor Helmut Friedburg. From 1961 to 1962 he spent a post-doctoral year at Harvard University, where he had the opportunity to work with Professor Norman F. Ramsey on aspects of the hydrogen maser. Back in Germany Ekkehard took a position at the newly founded Hahn-Meitner Institute in Berlin,

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where he headed a research group dedicated to measurements of nuclear moments after nuclear reactions. In 1971 he was appointed professor at the Free University in Berlin. During this period of time Ekkehard made numerous valuable contributions to nuclear physics and developed increasing interest in the application of nuclear techniques to solid state physics problems.

A major change in Ekkehard's life happened in 1975, when he was appointed Professor of Physics at the University of Konstanz. He joined the newly formed department of physics; for the remainder of his career he felt obliged to develop science and teaching to the very best at this young university. This change also prompted him to move into new fields of physics. He formed two active research groups, one working in the field of "nuclear solid state physics" and another one in cluster physics. Many of us are aware of his excellent contributions to point defects in solids studied with perturbed angular correlations and muon experiments, particularly on high- T_c superconductors. Highest recognition, however, came from his revolutionary experiments on stability of clusters. The discovery of "magic numbers" in rare gas clusters like xenon, and "Coulomb explosion" in multiply charged clusters have produced lasting footprints in this exciting research field.

Ekkehard has always felt his responsibility towards the public and society. When the Chernobyl disaster happened and a considerable amount of radioactivity hit the south-west of Germany, he started immediately to investigate the impact, deliver warnings and provide advices to the public. He stood up against attempts by politicians to suppress his scientific opinion and gained high respect for his courageous position.

Ekkehard was a gifted scientist and compelling teacher. His attitude towards younger scientists always was extremely encouraging and his contributions to our young university are unforgettable. He is greatly missed.