



## SVEN TESKE

**Renewable Energy Director,  
Greenpeace International**

**Age:** 44

**Born:** Germany

### **Current location**

Everywhere. Sven is based in Hamburg, but he's on the go for at least half the year.

### **Why Greenpeace?**

Sven was 19 years old when the Chernobyl nuclear reactor exploded. Just out of training as an offset printer, he wanted to study, but didn't really know what. The Chernobyl disaster made him choose engineering – to work on solutions to replace nuclear energy. He joined a local Greenpeace volunteering group a week after the accident – and has stayed with the organisation ever since.

### **Hopes for the future**

100% sustainable renewable energy.

**Sven, you've been with Greenpeace for over two decades now. What's your earliest memory of the organisation?**

That would be 1988 – my first action, but it wasn't exactly planned to be that way!

There was a chemical factory close to where I lived, which was discharging chemicals into the North Sea. I heard on the radio that Greenpeace was taking action against it, and since I lived nearby, I loaded my car full of food and went down to find them – I just wanted to help out the activists, because I believed in what they were doing. One of the guys there asked me if I was local and whether I knew anything about boats – I answered yes to both questions. He said, "Grab a suit and hop into the inflatable. We need to change the crew, they need to eat." So I ended up joining the action, and was there until the next morning. I called my boss at the offset printers where I was working and told him that I was ill and that I couldn't come to work. Unfortunately, he saw me on the television news that evening, taking part in the Greenpeace action. Well, perhaps not surprisingly, I lost my job!

**You went on to study engineering, while volunteering on Greenpeace ships as a driving instructor for the inflatables. You started working for Greenpeace straight after you finished your diploma.**

By pure coincidence, Greenpeace Germany's energy campaigner left the week I finished my diploma. They asked me to fill in for two weeks. That was in 1994, and I've been with Greenpeace ever since. I moved to Greenpeace International in 2004.

**What's it like combining your engineering background with what Greenpeace does?**

The biggest challenge lies in the communications aspect of it: To present relatively dry, figure-driven facts to a wider audience. To make clear what, exactly, it is that we're calling for. To provide a vision without coming across as too geeky. The problem is that engineering is sometimes the opposite of communication.

**One key part of your work at Greenpeace today is the Energy [R]evolution. What is this Energy [R]evolution? If anyone can give a simple explanation in just a few sentences, it's you...**

The Energy [R]evolution is a technical evolution – from the world's current pathway, where energy is used inefficiently, towards using it more efficiently and switching from dirty fossil fuels and nuclear energy to sustainable renewable energies. It provides the exact political and technical pathways we need to follow, to get from here to there. As an energy scenario, it takes in all the usual economic and geopolitical aspects, but – and this is what makes it quite unique – it also takes sustainability into account. With the Energy [R]evolution, we're building a bridge between climate policy and energy policy, including all the aspects of biodiversity.

**And how's the [R]evolution going?**

It's going well. We started in 2005 with the first scenario for Europe, followed in 2007 by the first global report. Since then, our report has been picked up by an amazing number of different publications. It hasn't always been easy. It took us about three years to break in to the scientific community. But now, the pick up is great. We've published energy scenarios for almost 40 countries, and the report has been translated into over 20 languages. All the projections we made for solar and wind energy, and for almost all the renewable sources, have basically materialised. Our estimations are perfectly on track. The pathway towards efficiency unfortunately isn't: We need more efficient equipment, more efficient vehicles. Overall, the main challenge is to achieve a consistent energy policy, focussed on renewables and energy efficiency. That's the only way to drive investment away from fossil fuels and towards renewables. A good renewable energy law is the mother of all investment decisions in the energy sector. We've made great progress in the last few years, but there's a lot more work to do.



**Greenpeace turns 40 this year. What does the organisation mean to you today? What makes Greenpeace Greenpeace?**

For me, Greenpeace is almost a lifestyle. It's a perfect combination of exciting campaigning and scientific work – and that combination is very rare. What's so inspiring about Greenpeace is our cultural diversity. We're working in this large global team that has a shared vision – not always the same opinion, but a shared vision. And that's really, really unique. And wherever you go in the world, it feels like coming home, in terms of how people treat you. This hospitality is great, and not many people have the privilege to experience something like it. What makes Greenpeace Greenpeace? Actions! We're combining inspiring actions, scientific work and public engagement. There are really good organisations out there working on the science base, there are good ones in public engagement. But to combine all of it the way Greenpeace does? I don't know of any other organisation that can pull this off the way we do.

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**Sometimes, the fight against climate change can seem like an enormous challenge. What keeps you going?**

I know that we're on the right side. Our vision is the right one – it's a vision worth fighting for. I can see renewables grow year by year. Almost everywhere I travel these days, I see more and more wind turbines and solar panels. I see success, that's what keeps me up and running. I also think that I live in very special times: Right now, humanity is at a crossroads and I have the opportunity to do my part, however small, to influence the direction we take.

**You're working on a truly global issue and your job requires a lot of travelling: India, Germany, Indonesia, the Netherlands. It's hard to tell where you might be from one day to the next - what's it like to live life on the go all the time?**

Working for Greenpeace International does require travelling, but that's just the way it is. If I didn't like travelling, it wouldn't be the job for me – but fortunately, I like it a lot. I use the time for reading and writing. I have a mobile office, and that's great. And I have to try to combine my busy schedule with my private life. What I really love doing in my free time is being out among nature; running marathons, canoeing, these are my big hobbies. Oh, and being offline! I think being offline is the luxury of the 21st century.

**Greenpeace has won many victories for the environment in the last 40 years. Which ones mean most to you?**

The World Park Antarctica means a lot and most people don't even know that Greenpeace was involved. That's a big victory. And then there's the fact that we actually managed to stop the expansion of the nuclear industry. Thousands of nuclear power plants were meant to be built, but they never materialised. I think Greenpeace played a crucial role in stopping them, and I think that in 50 years people will be very grateful to Greenpeace that we managed to limit the nuclear waste and all the problems connected to the industry to what we've got at present. And, well ... when it comes to the current boom in solar energy, I don't think we're entirely innocent either.