

Press Release
For immediate release

Dr. JoAnn Burkholder of NCSU receives National Award

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Dr. JoAnn Burkholder received River Network's highest award, the Jim Compton Life Time Achievement Award, on Sunday May 4, 2008 in Cleveland, OH. Dr. Burkholder is a tenured professor of Applied Aquatic Ecology at NC State University. River Network is a national non-profit organization working for clean and healthy waters. Its mission is to help people understand, protect and restore rivers and their watersheds.

Dr. Burkholder conducted groundbreaking research in the early 1990s which linked Pfiesteria to massive fish kills, nutrient pollution and human illness. Her findings resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in water quality improvements and additional scientific research for the Neuse River and other coastal estuaries. Her amazing discovery was the topic of a NY Times best-selling novel "And the Waters Turned to Blood" by Rodney Barker. The numerous beach closings, bans on fishing, and the thousands of children at summer camps who were prevented from swimming in the Neuse River in the mid 1990s likely prevented mass illness and unnecessary public exposure to Pfiesterias' dangerous neurotoxins.

Last year, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at the Center for Coastal Environmental Health and Biomolecular Research in Charleston, SC published a paper on Pfiesteria Toxins, which unequivocally validated Dr. Burkholder's research on Pfiesteria. For ten years, she endured personal attacks and multiple attempts to discredit her research, but was finally vindicated as a result of NOAA's recent findings.

According to Don Elder, Executive Director of River Network, "This award is to recognize Dr. Burkholder for her great work, but more importantly let the public know her scientific discoveries have been validated."

Upper Neuse Riverkeeper, Dean Naujoks with Neuse River Foundation presented Dr. Burkholder with the award (speech attached). He compared Dr. Burkholder to environmental hero Rachel Carson, whose research exposed environmental impacts of pesticides. At the awards banquet he stated, "I have always believed your contribution to science, to our environment and to all of humanity would one day be recognized. My hope is the award you are receiving tonight will be the first of many awards, grants and research funding that you rightfully deserve so you can continue your great work."