

The Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering  
2009 Distinguished Alumni Recipient

## Virginia S. Houk



Virginia S. Houk (MSPH '84, Turner Advisor) has been selected to receive the 2009 ESE Distinguished Alumnus Award. Her nomination was led by ESE Adjunct Professor Barbara Walton. Houk is currently a Peer Review Coordinator in the Office of the Director of Research Planning and Coordination Staff at the National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory (NHEERL) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at RTP.

From UNC, she received a BA in Zoology in 1974 and an MSPH from ESE in 1984. She also completed post graduate study from Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment in 1997.

Taken directly from Houk's nominator's letter:

"This nomination is based on contributions to science through her research on the genotoxicity of environmental contaminants in the first decade of her career and her leadership in establishing an effective peer review process within the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Virginia has provided outstanding leadership in upgrading the criteria and standards for the conduct of effective peer review of scientific research programs and science management throughout the agency. It pleases me to say that Virginia has brought ESE quality standards to this absolutely fundamental and vital process."

As a recognized expert on the scientific peer review process, Virginia serves as the Designated Federal Official and senior advisor to ORD for external peer-review panels. She works with the ORD National Program Directors and other senior staff to develop and manage all aspects of agency peer reviews, including identification of panel members, development of charges for the panels, conduct of the meetings, and development of the technical review document. In this capacity, Virginia continually oversees the agency's peer review process. She also convenes and leads workgroups to make recommendations on improving ORD process.

Virginia Houk's work has served as precedents for other EPA Research organizations and offices. In addition, the National Institute of Health Science (NIEHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have sought her guidance on establishing similar reviews in their own organizations."