

**NC State University engineering professor
honored with 2026 O. Max Gardner Award**

Dr. Richard Kim pioneered asphalt design, set standards for the U.S. highway network

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | May 21, 2026

RALEIGH, N.C. – Dr. Youngsoo Richard Kim, the Jimmy D. Clark Distinguished University Professor in civil, construction and environmental engineering at NC State University, has received the 2026 Oliver Max Gardner Award for his pioneering work in asphalt design that set standards for the U.S. highway system.

Established by the will of former North Carolina Gov. O. Max Gardner, the award is the UNC System's highest faculty honor. It is presented annually to the individual "who has made the greatest contribution to the welfare of the human race." Kim was recognized during today's UNC Board of Governors meeting.

Since joining NC State in 1989, Kim's research has advanced the design and reliability of pavement construction, affecting most roads in the U.S. highway system. The techniques pioneered by Kim established rigorous scientific standards for asphalt design, saving money and replacing outdated trial-and-error methods that previously produced premature road failures. His testing and predictive models have reshaped industry practice across the globe.



"We are incredibly proud of Dr. Kim's groundbreaking accomplishments – including the contributions he has made to improving safety and transportation infrastructure across the world," said NC State Chancellor Kevin Howell. "In addition, Dr. Kim has left an immeasurable impact on his peers and students, and we are grateful that he has made NC State his academic home."

The Federal Highway Administration selected his system of models and test methods as the foundation for its national roadmap to improve the U.S. highway network, investing \$8 million in his research. He also collaborated with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to develop new techniques for chip seals, a preservation treatment used on roughly 40% of the state's paved roads, nearly doubling their service life.

"Dr. Kim's achievement is embedded in millions of miles of this nation's highways, and his innovations have changed the roadbuilding industry," said UNC System President Peter Hans. "His work demonstrates the power of university research to produce practical solutions that affect our lives every day."

Kim's work over three decades attracted grant support totaling tens of millions of dollars, resulting in nearly 300 publications in peer-reviewed journals. He is known as a generous mentor; dozens of his former doctoral and master's students now hold faculty positions across the world.

Kim received the flagship transportation award from the American Society of Civil Engineers and was awarded NC State's highest faculty honor, the Alexander Quarles Holladay Medal for Excellence. He is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Korean Academy of Science and Technology.

"Dr. Kim's pursuit of excellence has impacted all North Carolinians, who have him to thank for safe and reliable roadways," said UNC Board of Governors Chair Wendy Murphy. "We are grateful for his commitment to research and his outstanding mentorship to students."