UNL professor awarded national Medal of Science

By CHRISTINE SIMMONS / The Associated Press
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WASHINGTON — President Bush awarded 30 science and technology medals Friday for breakthroughs in such fields as astrophysics, laser technology, climatology and tissue engineering.

The National Science Foundation administers the Medal of Science, which was established by Congress in 1959. The Medal of Technology was established by Congress in 1980 and is administered by the Commerce Department.

“We have researchers who have drilled into glaciers, isolated the DNA of mobile genes and pioneered the distributed feedback laser,” Bush said before presenting the medals in the White House’s East Room. “In other words, we’ve got some smart people here. And we’re glad you’re Americans.”

The awards were for 2005 and 2006. Bush was unable to present the 2005 awards due to a scheduling conflict.

Among the medal recipients in technology for 2005 was Dean L. Sicking, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, for his innovative design and development of roadside and race track safety technologies.

Sicking is director of the Midwest Roadside Safety Facility at UNL.

Sicking’s Steel And Foam Energy Reduction — or SAFER — barriers have been installed at tracks across the nation.

In 1998 the Indy Racing League approached him about developing walls that would diminish the danger of crashes. NASCAR joined the project in 2000.

Sicking’s energy-absorbing system is four steel tubes welded in 20-foot sections and bolted to concrete walls. Pads of hard foam are placed 10 feet apart between the steel and concrete.

The system dissipates the impact energy and distributes it over a longer distance of the wall without propelling the car back into the high-speed traffic.