

GE eucalyptus tree investigation urged

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Several U.S. environmental groups are upset concerning a possible link between a pathogenic fungus and genetically engineered eucalyptus trees.

The organizations want the departments of Health & Human Services, Agriculture, Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency to determine if the pathogenic fungal organism *Cryptococcus gattii* is present in genetically engineered eucalyptus trees being grown by ArborGen LLC in Alabama.

The request was made by the Sierra Club, the Global Justice Ecology Project, The Center for Food Safety, the Dogwood Alliance, and the Southern Forest Network.

"We know the *Cryptococcus gattii* pathogen is associated with eucalyptus trees in other countries and a federal investigation is urgently needed to fully assess ArborGen's proposed Alabama outdoor field trials of genetically engineered eucalyptus," said Neil Carman of the Sierra Club.

Rachel Smolker, a research biologist with the Global Justice Ecology Project, said "*Cryptococcus gattii* is considered by the Centers for Disease Control as an 'emerging infectious disease.' Inhalation of spores causes respiratory and central nervous system infection leading to fatal fungal meningitis."

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