

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Invasive pest threat prompts MDA to ask consumers to check wooden planters**

ST. PAUL, Minn. – The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is asking consumers for help in tracking down wooden planter boxes from Indiana that might be hiding a nasty tree pest called emerald ash borer (EAB). Officials made the request after learning that the boxes made from potentially infested ash wood were improperly shipped to Minnesota in violation of a federal quarantine.

The planter boxes in question are labeled “Nature’s Own Planters” by Lawson Products. They are about 24 inches by 8 inches in size, and made from ash tree slabs with bark attached.

EAB is a serious insect pest that has killed 20 million ash trees in Michigan and thousands more in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. While MDA’s statewide monitoring program has never found EAB in Minnesota, the insect can move to new areas in infested firewood or other ash material.

In an attempt to slow the spread of EAB, Indiana and several other states have been placed under a federal quarantine that prohibits export of ash trees or ash wood. However, last week MDA learned that a manufacturer in Indiana allegedly had mislabeled the planter boxes and shipped them into other states during the summer and fall of 2007 without the proper compliance agreement. The products apparently were distributed to Lowe’s stores in Minnesota. MDA officials continue to investigate the situation along with their federal counterparts.

According to MDA Plant Protection Division Director Geir Friisoe, Lowe’s officials have worked in cooperation with MDA to withdraw unsold items from stores, but the emphasis is now on tracking down those planters that already have been purchased.

“We’ve received great cooperation from the retail stores, and now we’re hoping to get help from individual consumers who may have bought these planter boxes,” Friisoe said. “We ask consumers who might have this product to contact us at 651-201-6343. Also, as an added precaution, we are asking people to either burn the planters or double-wrap them in 6 millimeter plastic bags and put them in the trash.”

Friisoe said none of the planter boxes inspected by MDA showed signs of emerald ash borer. However, he said the swift reaction is warranted given the serious threat EAB poses to Minnesota’s 870 million ash trees.

“This is not a pest we want in Minnesota,” Friisoe said. “The good news is that EAB is a weak flyer. It spreads mainly by movement of infested firewood, wood products and nursery stock. The public help keep this pest out of our state just by being aware of the risk and by avoiding moving these products across state lines.”

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This release is available on the MDA website at <http://www.mda.state.mn.us>

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