



News Release

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DON'T MOVE FIREWOOD

The Georgia Forestry Commission and Georgia State Parks are sounding the alarm on a camping activity that can cause serious damage to our forests. Campers and park visitors are being asked to not bring any firewood into parks or other natural sites because of the danger of transporting destructive foreign pests.

"Bringing in your own firewood seems like the smart and economical thing to do," said James Johnson, Forest Health Coordinator for the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC). "In reality, just a few microscopic fungus spores or tiny insects hiding in non-local firewood can wreak havoc on our native environment."

Johnson explained that local forest ecosystems have complex webs of checks and balances that combat native insect populations and plant diseases. Foreign organisms introduced into this environment are often resistant to these natural controls and can spread unchecked, resulting in much greater harm to our forests than is experienced with native pests. Spread of the gypsy moth and the destructive redbay ambrosia beetle, which causes laurel wilt disease, are suspected to have begun with the movement of firewood into the state. The emerald ash borer and sirex woodwasp are serious threats as well.

"Even a small chip of bark containing invasive insect larvae can fall unnoticed to the ground," said Johnson. "A sudden rainstorm can wash fungus spores off wood or out of your pickup, so the danger is very real." Johnson added that

According to Johnson, many species of hardwood and pine trees serve as potential hosts for these non-native pests, so no firewood is considered safe to be moved long distances. He said outdoor enthusiasts should purchase local firewood at the host park or at convenience stores selling firewood grown nearby. If campers have inadvertently brought in outside wood, it should be thoroughly burned onsite or turned over to park officials.

GFC and state park officials have launched an education campaign on the dangers of moving firewood. Georgia state park visitors are now learning about the "Don't Move Firewood" message from forest health experts, park rangers, posters, printed materials and complimentary refrigerator magnets. Georgia is home to 48 state parks that host 11 million visitors annually.

For more information on the safe use of firewood and Georgia's forestry resource, visit GaTrees.org. To learn about Georgia's state parks, visit GeorgiaStateParks.org or call 1-800-864-7275.

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SIDEBAR:

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- * Use local firewood or purchase firewood from the park office
- * If you brought firewood to camp with you, burn it all on-site before leaving
- * Don't move firewood outside of the county where it originated
- * Leave your firewood at home next time you visit Georgia's campgrounds