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German state suspends use of potato involved in GM crop snafu

Berlin (dpa) - The German state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania on Tuesday halted the distribution of some potatoes, after fields containing a not-yet authorized genetically modified (GM) variety of the crop were discovered over the weekend in Sweden.

The environmental lobby group Greenpeace publicised the discovery of the GM potato fields, where the "illegal" Amadea-type seed had been mixed with the European Union-approved Amflora-type seed. The fields are managed by a subsidiary of German biotech giant BASF.

The subsidiary also grows Amflora seeds in the Czech Republic and in German fields near Zepkow in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania.

The state's Environment Minister, Till Backhaus, said the restriction on the Amflora potatoes would be lifted only once officials determine there has been no GM contamination in Zepkow.

"My trust in the BASF quality assurance system has been seriously shaken," Backhaus said.

Amflora potatoes are designed for use in the production of paper and glue, and are not meant for consumption.

The European Commission said Monday it intended to summon BASF to Brussels so it can explain how

the crop contamination happened. GM crops are one of the most controversial issues within the EU.

The commission had authorised cultivation of the Amflora potato in March, ending the bloc's de facto 12-year freeze on GM crop. But in April, it followed up with a proposal to leave future decisions in the hands of member states. dpa ww fp amh Author: Winfried Wagner, Frank Pfaff

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