

Express PRA for *Neocucurbitaria salicis-albae*

– Occurrence –

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Brief assessment of the organism, e.g., if no data are available to prepare a regular Express Pest Risk Analysis (PRA), or if it is clear that the organism is not a pest of plants, or if it is already widespread in Germany or the EU.

Reason: Occurrence in Brandenburg on *Salix*

The fungus *Neocucurbitaria salicis-albae* Crous & R.K. Schumach. (Ascomycota, Pleosporales, Cucurbitariaceae) is most probably already present in Germany and has also been detected in Italy and some non-EU countries. It is not listed in the annexes to Regulation (EU) 2019/2072 or by the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO).

Due to the limited availability of information about the fungus, a complete Express PRA could not be carried out.

Neocucurbitaria salicis-albae was previously detected in Germany in 2017 on *Salix alba* near Berlin (not in Ukraine, as sometimes incorrectly reported) and in 2024 in Prignitz, Brandenburg on *Salix* sp. In 2021, it was detected in New Zealand on needles of *Araucaria bidwillii*. Another specimen has been found in the permafrost of Antarctica (Bunger Oasis, Wilkes Land, see https://vkm.ru/catalog/p_fungi/Neocucurbitaria_salicis-albae.htm). Furthermore, a strain of the fungus was detected in forest/leaf litter in the Great Khingan Mountains in China. In the Chinese study, cercosporamide was isolated from this fungus for the first time, demonstrating antibacterial activity against various plant pathogens. Further evidence exists from Italy and California (according to the sequence in GenBank), each in willows, and from Russia (without further details).

No detailed information on damage to host plants is available in the literature. However, the willows examined in Brandenburg did show damage (see Figures 1 and 2). The fungus is generally considered a secondary pathogen or a weakening parasite. It occurs as a non-pathogenic saprophyte in plant tissue but can become pathogenic when the plant ages or is under abiotic stresses (i.e. due to drought or flooding). *Neocucurbitaria salicis-albae* was isolated primarily from degraded wood.

It is believed that the definitive identification of this species is not yet complete. Strong similarities have also been observed with the species *Parafenestella salicis*, also from the Cucurbitariaceae family. The sequences for both species are largely identical but differ in length. There is also a high similarity to *P. salicis* with the isolate found in Germany by Crous et al. in 2017. A phylogenetic study could help to better clarify the actual distribution of this fungus.

It is assumed that *N. salicis-albae* can continue to establish in EU Member States where host plants are present due to suitable climatic conditions.

Due to the lack of information on distribution, damage, host plants, etc., and the predominant detection in decomposed wood and leaf litter, *N. salicis-albae* is not classified as a quarantine pest, and Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 is therefore not applicable.



Fig. 1 and 2: *Salix* lateral shoots infected with *Neocurbitaria salicis-albae*. Photos: © LELF (Dr. Katja Boldt-Burisch).