

Podcast: Activism's dark side—Earth Liberation Front bombs 'GMO' tree lab, destroys endangered plants instead

Law enforcement agencies keep a watchful eye on environmental groups that have engaged in eco-terrorism, notably [Greenpeace and PETA](#), and anti-biotech activists [continue to destroy](#) farmers' fields in pursuit of their ideological goal to eliminate GMOs. But arguably none of this activity has been as terrifying as one university attack 19 years ago.

In May 2001, radical activists with the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) firebombed the office of Toby Bradshaw, a biologist at the University of Washington. Bradshaw was investigating the genetics of poplar trees in an effort to increase their growth rate for the timber industry in America's pacific northwest.

The activist outfit, just a collective of autonomous individuals [engaged in](#) "guerrilla warfare to stop the exploitation and destruction of the environment," happily took credit for the terrorist attack. In a message sent to the university after the fire, ELF said they targeted Bradshaw's lab to stop him from releasing GMO "mutant genes" into Washington's forests. They also complained that one of his colleagues had taken research funding from Monsanto—in reality just a \$2,000 grant to send five students to a scientific conference.

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The attack caused [roughly \\$7 million](#) worth of damage, but ELF missed its primary target, instead destroying ecology labs and a horticulture center that grew fruits and vegetables for Seattle's low-income neighborhoods. Bradshaw's poplar research was minimally impacted by the fire. Among the actual casualties were endangered plants and a massive library of ecology books (some more than 400 years old), whose loss set back an environmental restoration project a decade.

The kicker: Bradshaw's work did not involve genetically engineered trees, nor was it funded by the biotech industry.

<https://geneticliteracyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/249-Bradshaw.mp3>

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