

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT?

Red imported fire ant is a serious exotic pest that poses significant social, economic and environmental threats to NSW. It is native to South America and is known to be highly aggressive and invasive and can inflict painful stings on people, pets and livestock.

HOW DID IT GET HERE?

The ants originated in Argentina and were detected at a secure port terminal where containers arrive in Australia on ships.

WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN FOUND?

The red imported fire ants were detected during routine surveillance at a port facility in Port Botany, Sydney. It appears that the detection is localised to the initial detection site. An established red imported fire ants nest was found on the site.

HOW DO I TELL IF ANTS ARE RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT?

Fire ants are small (2-6mm), reddish-brown in colour, with a darker abdomen. They are usually aggressive if disturbed and can inflict a painful, fiery sting. Fire ant nests often look like disturbed soil or a small mound of soil with no visible entry holes. A mature nest is often dome-shaped if in an open area but can also be found under logs, rocks or garden materials.

WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?

Look around any areas of disturbed ground, pot plants, top soil, mulch, under landscaping materials such as logs or stones, in any untidy or overgrown areas, near areas of permanent water eg dams, rivers or ponds.

WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

Fire ants are a serious exotic pest that threatens our lifestyle, environment, economy and agriculture. They can cause painful stings and in some cases may cause anaphylactic allergic reactions.

DOES IT AFFECT ME IF I DON'T LIVE NEAR PORT BOTANY?

Yes. It is everyone's responsibility to stop the spread of fire ants. The ants are highly invasive and could potentially spread across the State. The best protection is vigilance and everyone can look for signs of the ants.

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CAN I TREAT AN INFESTATION MYSELF?

No. Do not disturb a suspected red imported fire ant nest. Red imported fire ants are often highly aggressive and may swarm if disturbed. The best method of eradication is professional baiting and soil injection which can only be administered by trained professionals.

IS IT SAFE TO TAKE MY CHILDREN TO THE PLAYGROUND/PARK/BEACH?

Yes. To date, red imported fire ant has only been detected on one, secure site. If you do see any suspicious ants at outdoor recreational areas, please report them to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

WHAT DO I DO IF I SUSPECT RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT?

Do not disturb the ants or the nest. If safe to do so, take a photo and send to biosecurity@dpi.nsw.gov.au and report to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO CONTROL THE ANTS IN NSW?

All known ant nests have now been treated with baiting and direct soil injection. Eradication efforts are being undertaken in conjunction with the National red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program.

A control order, covering a two kilometre radius from the detection site, is in place to assist with crucial surveillance access requirements and limit movements of high-risk materials that could contain ants, such as soil.

The Department of Primary Industries is conducting extensive surveillance of all suitable habitat within the control area. This includes, but is not limited to, port facilities, beaches, playgrounds, golf courses, cemeteries and residential areas.

ARE THERE ANY RESTRICTIONS OR CONTROLS IN PLACE?

A control area is now in place that defines the high-risk nearby areas and will assist with crucial surveillance access. The control area is generally two kilometres from the detection site. A control order will be put in place to control movements of high-risk materials that could contain red imported fire ants, such as soil. The control area map is available [here](#).

HOW DO FIRE ANTS SPREAD?

Fire ants can spread naturally through flight, and by assisted spread such as movement of infested materials. Fire ant nests can have a single queen or multiple queens. A new queen



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will lay up to 20 eggs initially. Eggs hatch in 7-10 days and become adults after 9-15 days. A queen can increase laying capacity up to 800 eggs per day after the initial hatching.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FIRE ANTS?

People are encouraged to report any signs of suspected red imported fire ant to the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881. Do not move any restricted items out of the control area.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I GET STUNG?

Apply ice to relieve the swelling and pain. Gently wash the area with soap and water and leave any blisters intact. People who experience an allergic reaction after an ant sting should seek medical attention immediately.