



## Fire Ants

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### About Fire Ants

Red Imported Fire Ants pose a serious threat to our environment and have had significant environmental, health and economic impacts in other countries. This species has been found in Queensland – which has put Victoria on alert.



Fire imported Fire Ants\*, originally from South America, entered the southern United States in the 1930s (probably in soil used as ship ballast) and have been spreading ever since. Red Imported Fire Ants were unknowingly imported into Brisbane several years ago. The likely pathway of entry into Brisbane on two separate occasions and were found during 2001.

Red Imported Fire Ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) is one species of Fire Ant. Another species, Tropical fire ant (*Solenopsis geminata*), has been found in the Northern Territory. For easier reading, the term Fire Ant in this content referred to Red Imported Fire Ant.

### The Impact of Fire Ants

Fire ants will affect everyone. They have the potential to limit Australia's outdoor lifestyle, devastate our environment and reduce production of some agricultural industries. Fire Ants will also impact on land and business values and threaten our orchards, crops and pastures. They may even jeopardise our 'naturally', clean and green export image.

If Fire Ants bite children and pets they cause serious distress.



Fire Ants can,

- inflict a painful, burning sting;
- damage equipment and infrastructure;
- reduce property values
- invade backyards, parks and recreational areas;
- damage native flora and fauna and
- injure animals and damage crops.

The potential economic burden is also a major concern. The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics has predicted a cost to Australia of \$8.9 billion over 30 years, if the ant is not controlled.

### Surveillance and Prevention Program in Victoria

Victoria has a low risk of infestation of Red Imported Fire Ants. Fire Ants are currently not known to occur here, however there have been two detections in Victoria during 2001. One detection was in the Dandenong area amongst pot plants shipped from Brisbane, the other was in soil in a shipping container from the USA. Both infestations have been eradicated. Active surveying for the pest is underway in high risk locations in Victoria including ports, airports, freight terminals, nurseries and locations where materials have arrived from Queensland.

Fire Ants have already been declared as an exotic pest and a comprehensive set of regulations have been put in place in Victoria to control the movement of high risk materials

from Queensland including nursery plants, potting mixtures, mulches, soil and equipment. If discovered, a well planned eradication and containment program will immediately be put in place.

Victoria is also contributing to the \$142 million national eradication program being conducted in Queensland, where Fire Ants are established around Brisbane.

## Identification

The Red Imported Fire Ant is very similar to several local ant species.



They are:

- small, 2-6mm long;
- reddish-brown with a dark brown rear segment ;
- very aggressive;
- agitated when disturbed; and
- inflict a fiery sting causing blistering and sometimes an allergic reaction.

Common ants in Victoria are not so aggressive and will usually run away from any disturbances.



*Red Imported Fire Ant nests vary in shapes and sizes depending on age and soil type*

Fire Ant nests are:

- usually closed (ie: no central opening);
- a dome shaped mound ; and
- can be up to 45 cm high.

Native ants build smaller nests that have an obvious opening.

If you find any nest, DO NOT touch it and contact DPI on **136 186**.

## High Risk Materials

Fire Ants are most commonly spread through transportation of :

- Pot plants
- Soil
- Mulch
- Potting mix
- Baled hay or straw
- Landscaping and construction materials
- Machinery and equipment
- Aquaculture containers
- Timber or pallets

These must be checked carefully and appropriate inquiries made when transporting the above products from infested areas.

Do not transport any materials that have come in contact with Fire Ant-infested ground.

## What to do if you suspect you may have fire ants on your property?

- If you think that you have Fire Ants, contact the Department of Primary Industries **Customer Service Centre** on **136 186**.
- Do not disturb any Fire Ant nests. Any disturbance may encourage the colony to move somewhere else and this can make eradication more difficult.
- If you are sure that you have Fire Ant feeding sites and nests, you have the option of taking immediate action. (You don't have to wait for DPI to treat your property.) You can employ a professional pest controller, or you can use ant bait which can be taken by ants into the nest, however it is vital that you report any suspect ant colonies to DPI.
- Ensure that Fire Ant colonies are not spread from your property.
- Make sure that materials infested with live Fire Ants are NOT placed in your wheelie bin.

*The previous version of this Information Note was published in September 2004*

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