



Red Imported Fire Ant Management Considerations for Beekeepers

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Red imported fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta* Buren (Hymenoptera: Formicidae), can menace bees and beekeepers. Worker ants can invade bee hives and feed on pollen, bee pupae and developing bee larvae (protein), occasionally destroying weakened hives. They also sting repeatedly and in high numbers when their colonies or food sources are disturbed or threatened. Beekeepers can be attacked during hive maintenance operations.

The red imported fire ant infests the eastern two-thirds of Texas. This species can be moved to new, noninfested areas on such articles as nursery stock, sod, hay and bee hives. Counties in infested states are under quarantine by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Moving imported fire ants out of these areas is prohibited. The quarantine regulations are enforced in Texas by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA)(see “[Maps](#)” and “[Links](#)” sections on the web site, <http://fireant.tamu.edu>).

To prevent losses from red imported fire ants, beekeepers should monitor areas where bee hives are to be located and when they remain on site. Identify the ants there correctly. Avoid attracting foraging worker ants to hives by leaving dead brood and other material near bee hives. Keep bee colonies healthy and vigorous. To discourage ant colonies from moving into bee hives, elevate the hives several inches on timbers, bricks or stones. Prevent imported fire ants from spreading by inspecting hives and eliminating the ants *before* moving the bees to new locations.

If insecticides are to be used near bee hives, be careful not to poison the bees.

Chemical control options:

1. Treat heavily infested areas around hives using the **Two-Step Method (L-5070)**. Use products registered for the site where

hives are located. For **Step 1**, broadcast a conventional bait-formulated product. For example, those containing abamectin, hydramethylnon, fenoxycarb, pyriproxifen, or s-methoprene once or twice per year over an area of about ½ to 1 acre around the hives (see [B-6099](#)). Then, for **Step 2**, treat individual mounds to quickly eliminate only those nuisance ant mounds posing an immediate hazard. This step can be taken at any time, but usually beginning 2 to 7 days after broadcasting bait. Individual ant mound treatments are formulated as granules, liquids, dusts, fumigants and bait (see [FAPFS036](#)).

2. **(Optional)**. The outer surface of the pallets or stand elevating the hives can be carefully treated by applying a nonvolatile, long-residual contact insecticide. Specialty paint-on or paint-additive formulations have been available to produce a chemical barrier on treated surfaces. A registered contact granular or liquid contact insecticide also can be applied to the ground around the hives, beneath pallets or plastic ground covers. Preferably, treat before moving the bee hives to the location. To prevent bees from contacting treated surfaces, apply insecticides late in the evening or early in the morning when bees are not active. *Read product labels and use insecticides and formulations least toxic to bees.*

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For more information regarding fire ant management, see Extension publications [B-6043](#), *Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Urban Areas*; [B-6076](#), *Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Agriculture*; [B-6099](#), *Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control*; or [L-5070](#) *The Texas Two-Step Method Do-It-Yourself Fire Ant Control for Homes and Neighborhoods*. Also visit our web site at <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.

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