



# Fire Ant UPDATE: News from the Texas Applied Fire Ant Research and Education Program

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## **AWARENESS WEEK TURNS UP HEAT ON INFERNAL TEXAS PEST**

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SAN ANTONIO – In Texas, fire ant awareness may seem redundant. What Texan's life hasn't been touched by one – or several – of the little critters?

"There's a lot more to fire ants and how to control them than most people realize," said Nathan Riggs of Texas Cooperative Extension's fire ant research and management program. "That's why for the past several years Extension has been informing Texans about fire ants, especially during Fire Ant Awareness Week."

The awareness week was signed into law by Gov. George W. Bush in 1998 and set for the second full week in September. This year, that will be Sept. 12 - 18.

"We asked if it could be set for that time of year because fall is the best time to treat fire ants," said Riggs.

Much has changed in fire ant treatment since awareness week began, he said.

"People used to treat their lawns with broad-spectrum insecticides that would kill almost every other type of insect, but would not be very effective against fire ants," he said. "But today there are several user-friendly insecticides that have been developed specifically to treat fire ants."

Fire ant treatment is easy to overdo, and much of proper treatment depends on the number of mounds in the location being treated, said Riggs.

"If a lawn has fewer than five mounds, you're better off treating only the mounds," he said. "That's the most efficient way to kill fire ants, providing you follow a few basic rules, along with treatment directions."

Riggs said the basic rules for mound treatment are:

- Treating them in the early morning or late evening during hot weather.
- Following all conventional granular treatments with a gallon of water.
- Moistening mounds with flattened tops with water to bring ants closer to the surface.
- Not disturbing mounds too much prior to treatment so ants don't escape.

"If you have more than five mounds, the most efficient, cost-effective and least toxic way to treat is to use the Texas Two-Step method," Riggs said.

"The first step is to spread a fire ant bait product over the entire lawn," he said. "Fire ant bait is de-fatted corn grits soaked in soybean oil containing a toxin. This should be spread with a hand-held spreader, using about a pound per acre."

The best results occur when there is no rain. Don't water within 12 hours after the bait is spread, he added.

"The second step is to attack 'nuisance' mounds with a fast-acting mound treatment," he said. "Nuisance mounds are those with a lot of fire ant activity located in places where people

and animals are likely to get stung."

The two-step treatment, which usually costs about \$5 annually in chemicals, lasts for more than six months, said Riggs.

"Timing is also important for fire ant treatment," he said. "If you treat fire ants in the fall, there's about a 90 percent reduction the following spring."

Through Extension, neighborhoods can coordinate effective and low-cost fire ant treatment by selecting a day when everyone treats their fire ants.

"Extension can help with setting up a Fire Ant Day through neighborhood associations and other neighborhood groups," Riggs said. "We have had good success with these in the past and will be offering our help to coordinate them again this fall."

For more information on fire ants and how to treat them, call Extension at (210) 467-6575 or visit the Texas Fire Ant Program Web site at <http://fireant.tamu.edu>.

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## **RESEARCHERS SOUND ALARMS ON FIRE ANT INVASION**

PROVIDED BY Carol E. Russell, USDA-APHIS

TAIPEI, Taiwan, The China Post Staff

<http://www.chinapost.com.tw/taiwan/detail.asp?ID=52064&GRP=B>

Exotic red fire ants could ravage the whole island of Taiwan in the next three to five years if the government fails to take effective steps to ward off the massive invasion of the insects.

Researchers issued the warning when attending a symposium on the invasion of foreign species held at the Academia Sinica.

They said that the serious new pest found its way into Taiwan via the cargo containers for imported products two to three years ago. The fire ants have affected about 4,000 hectares of farmland in Taoyuan County, 100 hectares in Taipei County, and 50 hectares in Chiayi.

A total of 13 townships in urban and rural regions have reported severe infestations of the poisonous ants.

With a reddish-brown head and body as well as a darker abdomen, the ants originated in South America but have already caused direct damages totaling US\$5 billion a year in the United States. The attack from the fire ants also claimed lives, including over 100 deaths in 1984.

The experts said that in addition to farm lands, orchards, farmhouses, and bamboo woods, the ants also build nests in urban districts, including parks, streets, rail tracks, and electrical equipment like power meters and traffic lights or household appliances.

The fire ants inflict a fiery sting that causes blisters or pustules for several hours. The blisters become itchy while healing and are prone to infection if broken.

Some Taiwan farmers stung by the ants have had to stay in hospitals for several

days before recovery. The ants also attack domestic fowl or livestock.

The researchers expressed concern that Typhoon Aere, the latest typhoon that hit Taiwan hard, could have further expanded the habits of the ants on the island.

Without effective control, the annual financial losses caused by the ants could reach NT\$150 billion each year in Taiwan about 20 years from now.

The researchers said that 30 years later, the annual loss could double to NT\$300 billion per year.

They called for closer coordination among government agencies, including the Cabinet-level Council of Agriculture, to map out comprehensive measures to quickly eliminate the fire ants before they spread out of control.

### **PACIFIC ANT PREVENTION PLAN, MARCH 2004**

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The [Pacific Ant Prevention Plan](#) was developed by the Pacific Invasive Ant Group (PIAG) on behalf of the IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG). It lays out the recommended procedures, organization and measures required to achieve the goal of preventing the red imported fire ant and other invasive species with economic, environmental and social impacts, entering and establishing in or spreading between, or within, countries of the Pacific Region.

For updates and status of imported fire ant eradication efforts in California and Brisbane, Australia, visit these web sites: <http://www.ocfireant.com>; <http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/fireants>.

### **ADVION™ FIRE ANT BAIT OBTAINS REGISTRATION**

Dr. Charles L. Barr, Extension Program Specialist III - Fire Ants

Advion™ Professional Fire Ant Bait by DuPont finally received its registration. See links to the [label](#) and [MSDS](#). Numerous field trials conducted with formulations of this material have provided very good, consistent results. It is a conventionally-formulated bait that uses de-fatted corn grit as a carrier with the active ingredient dissolved in soybean oil, which also serves as the attractant. At a broadcast application rate of 1.5 lb/acre, suppression of foraging ants begins overnight. Three days following treatment, elimination of 95% or more of the ant colonies has been routinely documented! No other bait even comes close to this speed of control and it rivals that of contact insecticides. As with the other fast-acting baits, there are few residual effects, so re-invasion can begin almost immediately. The label includes individual mound treatment directions. However, with the speed of activity being the same for mound treatment as for a broadcast application, the only situation in which mound treatment could be

justified is where only a handful of mounds are present in an area, where it would cost more to broadcast, or when precise bait placement is needed such as near water or other sensitive sites. Note that Advion is for professional pest control operator sale and use only and limited to non-ag sites. DuPont is reportedly developing a consumer formulation, however. Even though the active ingredient is called indoxacarb, it is not a carbamate. Rather, it is a low-toxicity GABA inhibitor that must be consumed and metabolized to work. Speed of control has been the major roadblock to the acceptance of fire ant baits in both the consumer and professional markets. With control in 3 days, Advion should be a real breakthrough product.

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