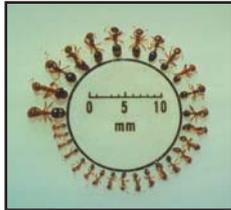


RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT ALERT!

(*Solenopsis invicta*)

Ant Facts

actual size



Red Imported Fire Ant

Origin/description Reddish-brown in colour, although some have a shiny, opaque black abdomen. Size varies from 3 to 6mm in length.

Nests The nest are mounds of fine granular soil and are highly variable in size (from several centimetres across in young colonies, to nearly a metre wide and high). They are often built in sunny, open areas, sometimes against a wall or a post or shrub. The insect will also build colonies in electrical boxes and the walls of homes and other dwellings.

Behaviour if a red imported fire ant nest is disturbed, ants rapidly swarm out and over the mound to defend the nest and onto or over, and sting, anything nearby.

Stings The sting of a red imported fire ant is painful (like a bee or a wasp). Symptoms include intense burning and itching, which usually subsides over the first hour, but which may return over the next few days. A blister forms at the site of the sting within five hours, this is followed by the formation of a white pustule within a few days.

New Zealand Ant

An ant over 6mm long will not be a red imported fire ant.

The vast majority of NZ ant species do not build mounds. However, there is one other introduced species that may create small dust piles. These dust piles will always be small (less than 3cm across).

Other New Zealand ants will either not swarm out of the nest, will run away from the disturbance, or will ignore it.

New Zealand ants do not sting, although some other introduced species do bite. If bitten, the affected area will not form a white pustule.

What to do if you suspect you have found (or been stung by) red imported fire ants:

- Do not disturb the nest (disturbance of a nest may cause red imported fire ant to move a queen out of the nest to start a new colony elsewhere).
- Call the Biosecurity New Zealand on 0800 80 99 66 and report your sighting.
- If you are unfortunate enough to be stung do not panic. The stings although uncomfortable are not dangerous to most people. However, the pustules can become infected if scratched and on very rare occasions people may have a more serious reaction. If you are stung and have any concerns, seek medical advice. If you believe you are having a serious allergic reaction it is important to seek medical help immediately.

THE THREAT

These ants, which are native to South America, are particularly aggressive and will repeatedly sting anything that appears a threat. They also pose a serious threat to our native fauna and flora.

January 2005



If you suspect you have found red imported fire ants:

Contact Biosecurity New Zealand on: **0800 80 99 66**