

## **Fire ant article for industry**

New detections of red imported fire ants have been found at Gainsborough Greens, Pimpama.

The fire ants were reported to Biosecurity Queensland by vigilant members of the public and Biosecurity Queensland officers are working to manage the infestation.

Attached is information about what activities Biosecurity Queensland will be undertaking on the site and the time frames that are involved.

Under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and Biosecurity Regulation 2016, anyone involved in the movement or storage of fire ant carriers such as soil, turf and mulch etc have a general biosecurity obligation to take all reasonable steps to ensure they do not spread fire ants.

You can fulfil your general biosecurity obligation by:

- understanding what fire ants look like and what materials they might be moved in
- being aware if you are living or working in a [fire ant biosecurity zone](#)
- being aware of [movement controls](#) relevant to the fire ant carrier you intend to move
- [cleaning down machinery and equipment](#) used when dealing with fire ant carriers before moving the equipment off site
- [conducting inspections](#) of material that can carry fire ants for any ant activity
- [reporting suspect ants online](#) or by calling Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

The Biosecurity Regulation 2016 prescribes procedures that you must follow when moving or storing a fire ant carrier. Find about more about procedures for [managing each fire ant carrier](#).

Specific provisions are not provided for all situations and there is flexibility to find better ways of managing risks.

### **Failure to comply with movement controls**

Biosecurity Queensland inspectors conduct random compliance checks to ensure businesses and individuals are complying with the procedures outlined in the Biosecurity Regulation 2016 when moving or storing a fire ant carrier.

Penalties for non-compliance apply under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*.

### **Fire ant awareness training**

A training session for all contractors working on site will be conducted within the coming weeks and you will be notified of the venue, date and time. We encourage you to take up this training opportunity and to forward the invitation to your staff and contractors.

By participating in this training you will learn:

- about the eradication program and movement control requirements under the legislation (*Biosecurity Act 2014* and the 2016 regulations)
- how to minimise the risk of spreading fire ants without interrupting your business activities
- how to confidently identify fire ants and their nests (with live fire ants).

Australia is the closest any country has come to eradicating fire ants, but we still have a lot of work to do to beat this serious invasive pest. We urge you to remain vigilant as we aim to eradicate them once and for all.



## Fire ant treatment for industry

### What happens when suspect ants are reported?

If it is determined that the ants are highly suspicious, Biosecurity Queensland staff will visit the site to collect samples of the ants and check the immediate area for additional nests.

When collecting the sample, if Biosecurity Queensland staff believe the suspect ants could be red imported fire ants (fire ants), an insect growth regulator (IGR) bait treatment will be applied around the nest to a distance of 100 m.

The samples collected will be sent to the laboratory for diagnosis. While diagnostics is undertaken please:

- avoid the nest for your own safety;
- ensure the ground that has been baited remains undisturbed for at least 7 days, including no watering for 48 hours.

**By not disturbing areas that have been treated for fire ants, the treatment will be more effective, with minimal disruption to your work site.**

### Diagnostics of sample

Biosecurity Queensland staff will notify you of the diagnostic result. If the sample is confirmed as fire ants we will discuss the planned treatment of your site, working with you to minimise disruption to you, your work, and other staff on site.

If the sample isn't fire ants you are free to continue to operate as normal, remaining vigilant for suspect ants.



Image: Biosecurity Queensland identify fire ant nests by a flag, paint, or a combination of both.

### What does treatment involve?

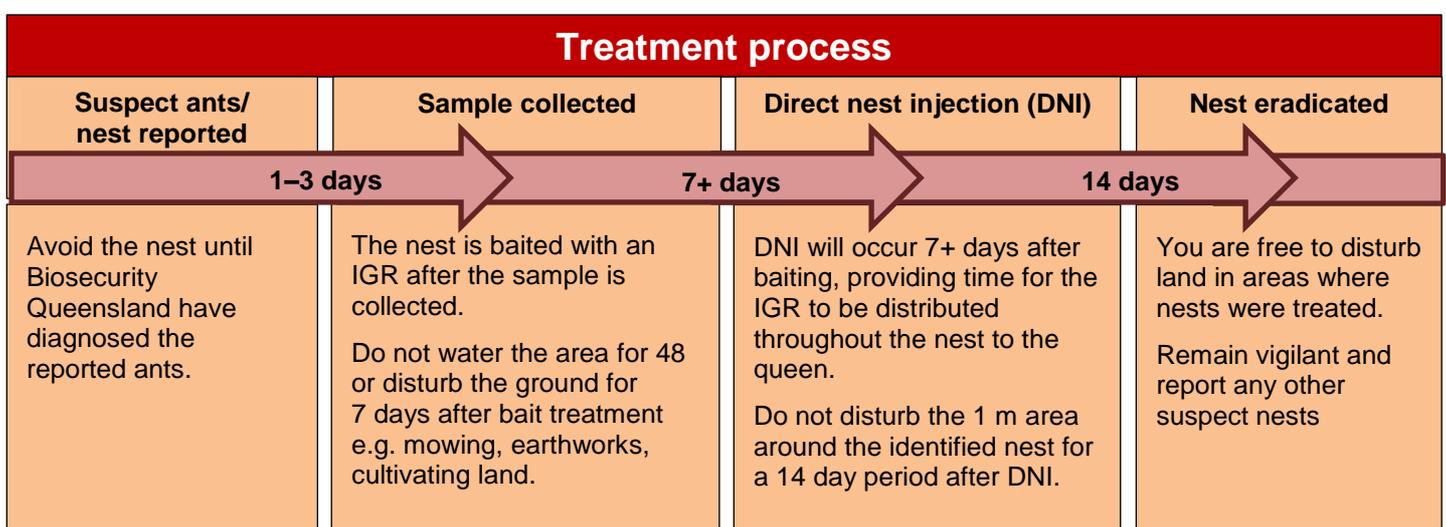
In the majority of cases where fire ants are detected on a work site, the nest will be destroyed by direct nest injection (DNI) which will kill the ants on contact.

DNI involves spearing a rod into the ground and flooding the nest and tunnels with a liquid form of the insecticide fipronil.

In some instances, Biosecurity Queensland may determine that regular bait treatments may be a more effective treatment method in the long term. Bait treatments will occur multiple times (up to 3 treatment rounds) per year over 2 years.

In determining a suitable treatment method the following factors are considered:

- the amount of infestation onsite and nearby;
- season (fire ants are less active in winter);
- your work practices and safety risk.



Timeframes are a guide only and can be impacted by inclement weather, weekends, public holidays and National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program (the Program) resources.



## What do I need to do before and after treatment?

Under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, everyone has a General Biosecurity Obligation to take all reasonable steps to ensure they do not spread fire ants. When treatment is taking place on your property you are expected to follow certain guidelines to ensure the treatment is effective.

For treatment to have the best chance of working, you **must ensure** that:

- after a direct nest injection, a 1 m area around each mound remains undisturbed for at least 14 days. This includes no mowing, digging, watering or laying new turf in the area around the mound.
- after the application of the bait treatment (corn grits), the ground remains undisturbed for at least 7 days.
- the baited areas are not watered for at least 48 hours after treatment.

Apart from the above mentioned, you are free to continue using your property as usual.

Restrictions apply to the movement of fire ant carriers such as soil, mulch, animal manures, baled hay or straw, potted plants and turf from a land parcel. Before moving materials that could carry fire ants, please check our website for more details.

## When can I enter the treated area?

After DNI, people and pets should not enter the treated area for 24 hours, or until the DNI solution is dry.

Fire ant bait treatment on the other hand is not harmful to humans or animals and you can enter the property or work site at any time after treatment takes place; taking care to avoid the nest as individual ants may still be active for some time after treatment.

## How much does the treatment cost?

There is **no cost** to you when we treat your property.

## Will I still see fire ants after the treatment?

It can take up to 14 days after DNI for the liquid insecticide to take full effect but after that time fire ants should no longer be present.

If the nest is bait treated, it can take at least four weeks for the active ingredient in the IGR to reach the queen. Within 4–6 weeks the colony is greatly affected, and between 8–10 weeks the majority of the ants will have died. It generally takes 3–4 successive bait treatments for eradication of fire ants from the site.

Fire ant bait treatment consists of corn grit soaked in soybean oil and infused with one of two IGRs designed to be taken back to the colony, ingested by the queen (5–7 year lifespan), who then becomes sterile. As no more worker ants (2–6 month lifespan) can be produced, the colony eventually dies out.

If you continue to find suspect ants after 3–4 months, report these to Biosecurity Queensland, who will collect ant samples to be diagnosed. If they are confirmed as fire ants, the treatment will be repeated.

## Can I treat the nest myself?

Fire ants are category one restricted matter under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* and landholders must report suspected sightings of fire ants on their property to Biosecurity Queensland within 24 hours or potentially face heavy fines.

Destruction of fire ant nests should only be administered by a qualified Biosecurity Queensland authorised officer. Treating the nest yourself is not recommend as this will likely be ineffective and result in the colony evacuating the queen and relocating to another area.

**There is also significant risk to your safety – fire ants are very aggressive and swarm when their nest is disturbed. Each ant can inflict repeated stings that are extremely painful, and in some cases can result in anaphylactic shock.**

## More information

We encourage and thank all Queenslanders for playing an active role in helping Biosecurity Queensland to eradicate this pest. The most important factor in the campaign to eradicate fire ants has not changed, and that is members of the public making their contribution by reporting suspect ants and following movement controls. With everyone involved, we can achieve eradication of this pest and preserve our unique way of life.

If in doubt, always report a suspect ant. For more information, contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 or visit [www.daf.qld.gov.au/fireants](http://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fireants).