

Red Imported Fire Ants

The Virginia Department of Agriculture (VDACS) has placed the following cities in a temporary quarantine status for Red Imported Fire Ants as of June 24, 2009: Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg. This quarantine restricts the movement of articles capable of transporting fire ants out of the quarantine area.



Movement of articles within the quarantine area is not restricted.

Examples of such articles are nursery plants, potted plants with soil, grass sod, hay, straw, honey bee hives and used soil-moving and farm equipment.

Fire Ants are small, reddish to dark brown ants 1/8 to 1/4 inch in size. Fire ants can be distinguished from other ants because of their mounds and aggressive behavior. Their mounds range in size from a softball to a soccer ball. They are usually found in warm, sunny, well drained areas like the southern side of a building or sidewalk. To confirm fire ants, carefully take a stick and lightly scratch the mound. Fire Ants will come boiling out of the mound ready to bite and sting any person or pet they come in contact with. Their bites and stings cause painful whelps on the skin. Persons highly sensitive to insect stings may go into anaphylactic shock as a result. Fire ants are especially dangerous for children or small pets. Adults can be stung by multiple fire ants before they realize they have disturbed a mound.

Farms, Nurseries, Greenhouses:

Business or individuals needing to do commerce outside the quarantine area must be certified as being fire ant free by VDACS. Call VDACS in Franklin, VA (562-6637) to inquire regarding the steps to take. Businesses and individuals that ship regulated articles out of the quarantine area on a regular basis can enter into a compliance agreement with VDACS to do self-certification according to VDACS standards.

The reason for the quarantine is that eradication within this area is no longer feasible due to the indigenous population that has established here. VDACS will no longer treat this federally regulated pest in the quarantine area. Landowners within the quarantine area will be responsible for any treatments that occur on their property.

Homeowners:

Homeowners also will be responsible for treating fire ants found on their property. Homeowners are urged not to use home remedies (drenching with water or fire) to try to control fire ants. These efforts will usually only cause fire ant colonies to split and spread. Instead, purchase fire ant bait at any retail store and sprinkle 2-5 tablespoons around the outside edge of the mound. Fire Ants are foragers and they will find the bait and take it back into the mound where it will kill the queen, thus destroying the colony.

Baits usually take 1-2 weeks to be effective, so try to avoid disturbing the mound until the bait has had time to be effective. If the mound poses a great threat to small children or pets and needs to be eradicated immediately, call a pest control firm and they can better treat the mound with a liquid drench which is faster acting, but more difficult to apply.

For more information on Fire Ants, call the Chesapeake Extension Office at 382-6348.

