

Questions and Answers: Moving Baled Hay From Areas Under Quarantine for Imported Fire Ant

Imported fire ants can harm agriculture and injure animals and people with their painful stings and venom. These invasive pests can move to new, non-infested areas by hitchhiking on agricultural commodities, including baled hay. To prevent that from happening, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has established quarantine areas where we know imported fire ant colonies exist.

While some hay produced in these areas is prohibited from moving outside of the quarantine zone, most hay can move without restriction. This factsheet offers some simple steps that hay growers and suppliers inside an imported fire ant quarantine area can take to ensure their product moves quickly and easily to where it's needed by farmers and livestock.

What is the quarantine zone for imported fire ant?

Most of the southeastern United States is currently under quarantine. In addition, most of Texas, southern Oklahoma, all of Dona Ana County in New Mexico, all of Orange County and parts of Los Angeles and Riverside counties in California, and all of Puerto Rico are under quarantine. To determine whether you are in a quarantine area, visit USDA's imported fire ant Web site at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/ifa> and click the "Imported Fire Ant Quarantine Interactive Map" link.

What kind of hay is regulated in these areas for imported fire ant?

In quarantine areas, USDA regulates only baled hay and baled straw that are stored in direct contact with the ground because they pose a risk for harboring imported fire ants.

This hay may move anywhere within the quarantine area.



Under what conditions can baled hay leave the quarantine area **WITHOUT** restrictions?

Baled hay that meets any of the requirements below is not regulated and has no movement restrictions:

- For baled hay that is stacked, all bales except the bottom layer that is in direct contact with the ground.
- Hay that is cut, baled, loaded, and shipped without storage.
- Baled hay that is stored on an impervious surface such as hard pan (highly compressed soil), asphalt, concrete, etc.
- Baled hay that is stored elevated above the soil on pallets or tires or stored on landscaping cloth placed over the soil.

Under what conditions can baled hay leave the quarantine area **WITH** restrictions?

Hay or straw from inside the quarantine area that is stored in direct contact with the ground may move outside the quarantine area provided it has been inspected, found free of imported fire ants, and travels with a certificate or permit issued by the State department of agriculture or local USDA office. You can find contact information for State departments

of agriculture on the National Plant Board's Web site at <http://nationalplantboard.org/membership>. For local USDA offices, visit <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/sphd>.

What hay cannot leave the quarantine area?

Any hay that contains soil OR does not pass inspection may not leave the quarantine area.

What are some best management practices for baled hay storage that reduce the chance of fire ants infesting the hay?

The best management approach is to reduce or eliminate fire ants on the property annually. Your local Extension specialist can provide guidance on how to accomplish this. To find contact information for your local Extension office, visit <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/LGU-map>. In addition, the following storage practices can help reduce the risk of moving infested hay and straw:

- Applying fire ant bait (insecticide) around the outside of hay storage areas.
- Storing hay on an impervious surface such as asphalt, concrete, or hard pan.
- Elevating hay in the field onto a pallet or tire or placing it on landscaping cloth so it is not in direct contact with the ground.
- If available, requesting an inspection by a State agriculture inspector to certify that the hay is free of fire ants.

Before the hay leaves the quarantine area, the shipper should place food that typically attracts ants (such as a cooked hot dog, crumbled cookies, or peanut butter) on a card close to the loaded bales on the trailer and then check for ants after an hour or so.

What should buyers do when purchasing hay produced within a quarantine area?

When placing the order, determine if the supplier is within the quarantine area for the imported fire ant. To do so, visit USDA's imported fire ant Web site at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/ifa> and click the "Imported Fire Ant Quarantine Interactive Map" link. Also, ask the supplier to ensure the hay is free of fire ants, and visually inspect the hay bales when they are delivered to you. If possible, request that the hay be certified for movement by the State from which it is shipped.

If you find any fire ants, contact your State department of agriculture or local Extension office. You can find contact information for State departments of agriculture on the National Plant Board's Web site at <http://nationalplantboard.org/membership>. For local Extension offices, visit <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/LGU-map>.

What threat does the imported fire ant pose to agriculture?

These ants will feed on the buds and fruits of numerous crop plants, especially corn, soybean, okra, and citrus. They can also girdle young trees. Large nests located in fields interfere with and damage equipment during cultivation and harvesting. Imported fire ants respond rapidly and aggressively to disturbances, and ant attacks inhibit field-worker activities. A single fire ant can sting its target repeatedly. Young and newborn animals are especially susceptible to the venom of these stings.

For more information on imported fire ants and APHIS' regulations, please visit <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/ifa>.