



Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Truckers: Don't Let Imported Fire Ants Hitch a Ride



Two species of imported fire ants—black and red—were introduced into the United States from South America at the port of Mobile, AL. Today, fire ant infestations are found in 14 States and Puerto Rico.

Credit: USDA APHIS PPQ Archive, USDA APHIS PPQ, Bugwood.org

Imported fire ants are one hitchhiker you want to avoid. Their painful sting can hurt people, injure animals, and harm U.S. agriculture. They can also cause you significant delays on the road—24 to 48 hours—if Federal or State agriculture inspectors find these ants in your truck or on the cargo you're carrying. So, if you're hauling baled hay, straw, nursery stock, sod, loose soil, or soil-caked heavy equipment, read on to find out what you need to do to keep these ants from hitching a ride.



Imported fire ants are aggressive and will swarm and attack if their mound-shaped nests are disturbed.
Credit: Jake Farnum, Bugwood.org

Know the Risk

To stop the spread of imported fire ants, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and State departments of agriculture regulate the movement of certain items out of areas where we know imported fire ant colonies exist. Quarantined areas include all of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Puerto Rico and portions of Arkansas, California, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. To see the most current quarantine map, visit www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/ifa and click the "Imported Fire Ant Quarantine Map" link.

Avoid Delays

Some items require a permit if you move them out of a quarantine area. The permit confirms that these items aren't infested with imported fire ants. If you don't have a permit

confirming your cargo is free of imported fire ants, State agriculture station officials may delay you 24 to 48 hours while they inspect your truck and its cargo and, if necessary, supervise its cleaning.

The following items must be inspected and permitted before you can move them out of a quarantine area:

- Bulk soil, mulch, composted soil, topsoil, and other articles whenever compacted soil is present. Commercially prepared potting soil in its original container is exempt.
- Baled hay and straw that has been stored in direct contact with the ground.
- Plants and grass sod with roots and soil attached, including containerized nursery stock, balled-and-burlapped nursery stock, sod squares, or rolls (plants maintained indoors and not for sale are exempt).
- Soil-moving equipment, unless all compacted soil is removed.
- Any other article that could spread imported fire ants.

The owner is responsible for getting the cargo inspected and giving you a copy of the permit **before** you leave the quarantine area. To obtain a permit, the owner should contact the State department of agriculture (nationalplantboard.org/membership) or the local APHIS office (www.aphis.usda.gov/planthealth/sphd).

Look Before You Leave

Even if your truck and its cargo have been inspected, you still need to take care to prevent imported fire ants from hitching a ride. Be aware when you overnight. Mound-shaped fire ant nests may be near parking and rest areas, and if disturbed, ants can easily relocate their colony in a few hours...and that may be onto your truck! Here are some simple tips for steering clear of fire ants:

- Inspect the truck before beginning your trip to make sure no fire ants are present.
- Park on pavement whenever possible to discourage fire ants from climbing onto your truck.
- Eliminate an infestation in or around your truck with a commercially available insecticide labeled for use on fire ants.

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