



To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

For Immediate Release: Contact Anne Fitzgerald
October 2, 2006 800.282.8685 (DE only)
302.698.4520
302.242.4092 (Cell)

Number of pages: 2

Red imported fire ant alert **Harmful insect pest found in Rehoboth Beach**

Dr. Faith Kuehn, Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) Plant Industries Administrator, confirmed today that red imported fire ant, (*Solenopsis invicta*), a harmful insect pest, has been positively identified in plant material in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware on three different occasions this year and once last year. Following eradication efforts, last year's infestation and this year's first two infestations have had no recurrence. The third infestation is currently undergoing eradication procedures overseen by the DDA Plant Industries staff in cooperation with the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Plant Protection and Quarantine Unit.

Prevention of fire ant infestation requires a cooperative effort by consumers, sellers of plant materials, nurseries, and regulatory agencies such as DDA and APHIS.

- Consumers are asked to inquire about the origin of any plant material when purchasing it. They should inspect any purchased plant material that comes from quarantined states for small, aggressive, red stinging ants. Anyone finding a suspicious ant should contact the DDA Plant Industries Section at (800) 282-8685 (DE only) or (302) 698-4500.
- Consumers who travel in quarantined states should not purchase plant material or take plant material from friends or relatives that has not been properly inspected before bringing it back to Delaware.
- Nurseries and other plant establishments in Delaware should check each shipment of plant material received from the southeastern United States for the appropriate credentials and inspection certificates. Delaware Nursery Law requires that each shipment of nursery stock be accompanied by a Certificate of Inspection from the state of origin. In addition, those states who are part of a federal quarantine must have an additional certificate or stamp attached which contains the following language:



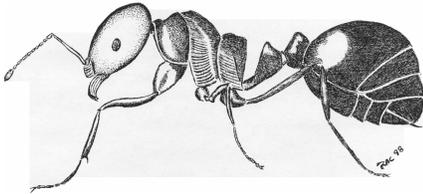
US Department of Agriculture
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Plant Protection and Quarantine
Riverdale, MD 20737

**Certified under all applicable federal or state cooperative domestic
plant quarantines**

The current quarantined states are Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida. To date, the majority of plant material found in Delaware and Maryland with fire ant infestations has been from Florida. The 1998 fire ant infestation in Bear was caused by plant material brought into Delaware from South Carolina by a consumer who visited the area.

Imported fire ant (IFA) infestations cause significant loss in U. S. agriculture and are a human health hazard. IFA attacks have been documented as causing low weight gain, deformity, and death in pigs, calves, sheep, quail, deer, and other wildlife. Young and newborn animals are especially susceptible. These ants will girdle young trees and feed on the buds and fruits of numerous crop plants especially corn, soybeans, okra, and citrus. Large nests located in fields interfere with and damage equipment during cultivation and harvesting, while ant attacks and possible allergic reactions inhibit field worker activities.

Not all ants are fire ants. Red imported fire ants are small (3-6 mm in length) and red to reddish brown in color.



They build mounds that may reach 18 inches high and spread 3 feet across. Unlike ant hills, the mounds have no visible external opening. Care should be taken when examining a suspected mound. When the nest is disturbed, the fire ants swarm out of the mounds, covering and attacking the enemy. Their sting is very painful. The venom from multiple stings may cause a variety of symptoms: nausea, dizziness, and even death.

Fire ants may over winter in this area. A previous infestation in Bear Delaware in 1998 was not declared eradicated until 2000.

-End-