



## THE RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT (*Solenopsis invicta*): A SEVERE AND IMMINENT THREAT TO HAWAII.



Unless heroic prevention/rapid response efforts are initiated, Hawaii faces imminent invasion by an ant species for which there will be extreme consequences. The red imported fire ant (RIFA) is a notoriously destructive and aggressive stinging ant that is highly invasive and impossible to eradicate once established. Dispersed primarily through human commerce, it has invaded over 300 million acres in the United States. Recently established in California, it may likely become the next major pest invasion in Hawaii due to the huge quantities of goods shipped to Hawaii from California. If this ant is allowed to become established, it will no doubt cause disastrous economic and ecological impacts that are at least equal in magnitude to those predicted for the much-feared Brown Tree Snake. The imported fire ant is a serious threat to public health and safety, industry, biodiversity, economy, and quality-of-life. Its aggressive nature and powerful sting have caused the deaths of at least 80 people, injury to tens of thousands of people annually, and injury and death of wildlife, livestock, and pets. Its broad diet, which includes plants and animals, has caused serious declines in biodiversity, and substantial agricultural damage. Biodiversity impacts can be expected to be particularly severe, since the Hawaiian biota evolved in the absence of native ants. This ant's attraction to, and damage of, electrical equipment affects communication, transportation, electrical distribution, and safety lighting systems. Public health and safety needs require control with large-scale use of pesticides, which affects water quality.

Texas IFA Management Project



RIFA stings on arm

### \*IMPACTS OF RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS\*

- In heavily infested areas, 30-60% of people are stung each year.
- Children, elderly, and youth have the highest incidence of stings. Tourists and new residents from un-infested areas are another high risk group.
- In S.Carolina, during a one yr period, there were an estimated 660,000 sting cases. 33,000 of these required medical attention. About 170 individuals were treated for sting induced anaphylactic shock. And, two RIFA related deaths were reported
- In Texas, annual medical costs exceed \$47 million
- Infested areas like yards, parks, schoolyards, golf courses, and pastures are often simply not usable unless they are treated with pesticides on a regular basis.

• In five urban areas of Texas, annual cost of RIFA to: Households = \$525,882,656, Golf Courses = \$29,487,659, Schools = \$25,441,524. Expenses include: pesticide treatment, replacement/repair of equipment, and medical costs.

•Fire ants cost each golf course in urban Texas \$63,495/yr

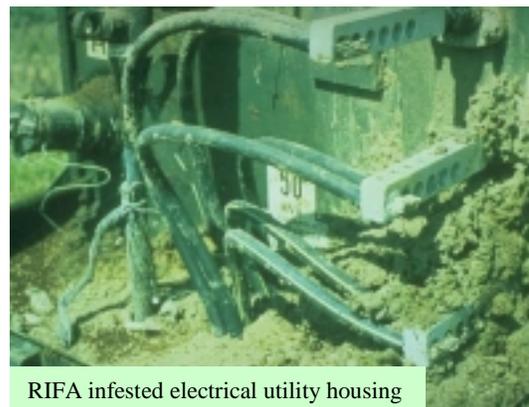
•In S.Carolina's nursery industry, treatments,including those required by the federal fire ant quarantine, can cost over \$650/acre annually.

•Many crops are known to be damaged by these ants including corn, cucumber, eggplant, and citrus trees.

•Red imported fire ants cause death, injury, and reduced weight in cattle and poultry, and also damage feed and water equipment. Loss to the Texas cattle industry = \$255 million per year.

•Wildlife negatively impacted by RIFA includes invertebrates, reptiles, birds, small mammals, and even large mammals such as deer.

•Red imported fire ants commonly infest and damage equipment such as traffic boxes, airport runway lights, electrical distribution systems, air conditioners, and well pumps. In Texas, estimated damage to the electric utility industry = \$153 million dollars/yr.



RIFA infested electrical utility housing

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For more information, see the Hawaii Ant Group website at: <http://hbs.bishopmuseum.org/ants>  
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