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Fire Ants: The Battle Returns

Due to the recent rains, fire ant mounds are popping up in every location. These medically important insects should be controlled in and around structures, as to avoid harming other animals. Also if we treat now, we will have less fire ant colonies next spring.

Before treating for fire ants, one will need to survey the area to determine the number of mounds on their land. If more than 5 mounds are present in a quarter acre plot, the land is considered infested and it should be treated by broadcasting a fire ant bait or over the entire infested area.

The Texas Two Step is one recommended program for fire ant control. The first step of the Texas Two Step method is to broadcast fire ant bait over the entire area. A fire ant bait is a product containing both a food source and an insecticide. This bait is collected by worker ants and carried back to the colony to be shared with the queen and other ants. The delivery process of baits into the colony is so effective, that the amount of insecticides applied in an area is significantly reduced. However one should only use fresh bait products, since fire ants will not pick up the bait if it smells rancid. The second step of the Texas Two Step Program is to treat the individual mounds. Treating individual mounds is the fastest way to get rid of the fire ant mounds, but it is more labor intensive and more costly to apply when compared to the broadcast baits. Therefore, step two should be limited to those mounds found around the foundation and in high traffic areas.

Fipronil granule contact insecticides, such as Over 'N Out™ and TopChoice™ can also be used as a one step method for fire ant control. These products should be applied over the entire infested area, and need to be watered in for control. These products usually provide 9 to 12 months control.

For more information about fire ants, please visit the fire ant webpage at www.fireant.tamu.edu



Red imported fire ant worker. Photo by Bart Drees, Texas A&M University.

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