

# RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT ALERT!

The Hawaii Departments of Health and Agriculture (HDOH and HDOA) need your help in preventing red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) from establishing in Hawaii. The red imported fire ant (RIFA) is an extremely aggressive stinging ant that has invaded over 300 million acres across the mainland U.S, where it has become a significant public health hazard. **Although this ant is not yet known to occur in Hawaii**, the risk of establishment of this species in Hawaii is high due to recent expansion of the RIFA population westward into California, and beyond the mainland U.S. into Australia. RIFA are impossible to eradicate unless they are found when populations are still young and small. Therefore, early detection and reporting of incipient populations is critical to preventing establishment of this ant in Hawaii. You can assist prevention efforts by reporting potential RIFA stings to HDOA.

## WHAT ARE RIFA?

RIFA are small reddish ants that usually nest on the ground in mounds they build from soil. They prefer open sunny areas, but can be found nesting almost anywhere. RIFA are extremely aggressive toward anything that disturbs their mound. When disturbed, hundreds to thousands of RIFA will rapidly swarm out over the nest mound, climbing up onto (and stinging) anything nearby. Because of this aggressive behavior, and the fact that each individual ant can sting repeatedly, a single encounter with RIFA can result in tens to hundreds of stings to the victim.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PERSON IS STUNG?

Symptoms of each sting are a burning and itching that lasts about one hour. The visible reaction at each sting site usually includes immediate formation of a red swelling, followed within a few hours by formation of a small blister, followed within a day or two by formation of a white pustule. These pustules can last for several weeks if not scratched or otherwise disturbed. In some cases, reactions to RIFA stings also include large localized swelling reactions, or life-threatening anaphylactic shock.

## HOW DO RIFA DIFFER FROM OTHER FIRE ANTS?

The type of fire ants currently found in Hawaii are not extremely aggressive and will not vigorously defend their nest if disturbed, also, their stings will not usually result in formation of white pustules on the skin.



*RIFA workers and queen*



*RIFA stinging a persons arm*

## WHAT TO REPORT AND WHERE TO REPORT IT



*Pustules on foot*



*Pustules on leg*

**If you've been stung by ants, where you've sustained several stings, and each sting resulted in formation of a white pustule within a day or two of being stung, please report the incident to:**

**Hawaii Department of Agriculture**  
**Phone: 973-9528 or 586-7378 (Oahu)**  
**974-4141 (Hilo)**  
**326-1077 (Kona)**  
**873-3555 (Maui)**  
**274-3069 (Kauai)**