

Safety Alert

Mines Inspectorate—All mines

Safety Alert No. 281 | 23 December 2011

Fire ants found in mining equipment in Roma

What happened?

Red imported fire ants were found in a box of mining equipment in Roma. The box had been recently imported from Houston, USA—an area significantly infested with fire ants.

Mining company staff promptly killed the ants with fly spray then contacted Biosecurity Queensland. Biosecurity Queensland has commended the company's quick and proactive response because killing the ants means they are unlikely to have spread.

Fire ants pose a significant threat to Australia. They are currently only found in South East Queensland, where a national eradication program is underway. Their impacts include:

Medical: Painful stings, secondary infections and human deaths from anaphylactic shock (to date, 80 deaths in the USA)

Economic: Damage to livestock, crops, tourism, agriculture and electrical equipment.

Environment: Harm to wildlife and plants, potentially affecting whole ecosystems. They kill native animals and have been known to blind cats and dogs.

Lifestyle: Reduced outdoor activities (in backyards, parks, schools, sports grounds)

Why did it happen?

The ants were not detected when they entered Australia. The ants were found at the base of the crate between a hard case and the wooden structure. With the growth of mining in Australia and increased imports from the USA, China and Taiwan, which have large fire ant infestations, there are greater risks of this pest becoming established in Australia.

Next steps

- Biosecurity Queensland will work with the Queensland mining industry to provide information, education and training about fire ants. A national engagement strategy is being implemented.
- Mining personnel are encouraged to be vigilant when opening imported articles. If ants or other pests are noticed, contain the situation, kill them immediately, and call Biosecurity Queensland on **13 25 23**. Further information on fire ants is available at www.biosecurity.qld.gov.au
- Biosecurity Queensland is working with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service to understand how this new incursion arrived in Australia.



Fire ants are small (2–6 mm), have a coppery coloured body and darker abdomen. They are aggressive and will attack en masse. Their nests in soil usually have no visible entry or exit holes.

Stewart Bell

Deputy Director-General and Commissioner for Mine Safety and Health

Neil O'Brien

Director, Biosecurity Queensland Control Centre (BQCC)

Contact: Anthony Wright, Community Engagement Manager, BQCC, +61 (07) 3310 2912

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