Red Imported Fire Ants

Stay informed and you won’t get “stung”

Fire ants are becoming more and more abundant across North Carolina. As fire ants spread across the state, more people are likely to encounter them and be stung. Therefore, it is important that you remain up to speed about these pests. Not only can fire ants become a nuisance when they invade structures in search of food and water, fire ants can also deliver painful stings if the mound is disturbed. Within 24 hours after a person is stung, a pustule-like sore forms at each sting site, which usually itches intensively. Scratching the pustule may rupture the skin, leading to secondary infection and scarring. A small proportion of people stung are highly allergic to fire ant stings and require immediate medical attention.

Assisted living homes and hospital patients that are bed ridden or less mobile may be at greater risk of being stung repeatedly if fire ants get into patient rooms. If you have sensitive accounts with fire ants, such as schools, hospitals, and nursing homes, proper documentation is key. Document any recommendations you make to the customer, such as repairing tears in screens, sealing up gaps in foundation walls, improving sanitation, repairing plumbing leaks, etc. If your account requests a proposal for the treatment of fire ants, but declines the proposal and treatment, document that in your customer’s file. If someone is stung, the fingers may start pointing at the pest management professional. With proper documentation, you will be better armed to defend your treatment plan, or lack thereof.

Another important point to keep in mind is that in order to treat fire ants under a Structural Pest Control License, the ants must be associated with a structure. For example, if one of your accounts is a school and there are fire ants mounds along the sidewalks leading to the school, you are allowed to treat those mounds. However, in order to treat fire ant mounds on the school’s football field, you would need a Turf & Ornamental License.

When treating for fire ants, there are two basic control strategies: mound treatments or broadcast treatments.
RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS, CONT.

Mounds may be treated with a liquid or granular insecticide, or with a bait. Mound drenches are usually the preferred treatment in areas such as home lawns, school grounds, parks, or other areas where the risk of humans being stung is high.

When using a liquid insecticide, it is important that the product reaches most of the ants, including the queen and brood. This is usually best achieved using a termite rod.

Keep in mind that mound drenches work best during the spring and fall, when the ants are close to the surface. During the summer, ants will remain deep within the mound in the heat of the day, so liquid treatments applied in the morning or evening will yield better results.

Baits may be used to treat individual mounds. Remember that intense sunlight, high temperatures, and high humidity can rapidly degrade the active ingredients in baits. In addition, moisture can lead to the bait’s attractant oils becoming rancid and less attractive to foraging ants or may cause the bait granules to lodge in the grass so the ants do not readily find them.

You can also apply a mound drench using a liquid insecticide 5-7 days after baiting (the “two-step method”).

When using baits, it is important that your client understands that results will not be immediate. Moreover, your client may assume you are applying a contact granular insecticide and may become frustrated if they do not see quick results. Therefore, good communication and client education is critical.

Another approach to treating fire ants is broadcast applications of insecticides (liquids, baits, granular insecticides) over a large area infested with many fire ant mounds. Broadcast treatments allow large areas of infestation to be treated quickly. When using granular insecticides for fire ant control, it is important to remember that these products require rain or another source of moisture to be effective. For example, the Topchoice™ label states “for best results, treated turf should be watered or irrigated after application.”

Know your product and your treatment area before you begin. Your treatment plan may change depending on certain factors, such as nearby water sources, vegetable gardens, etc. The Topchoice™ label states “do not apply to areas where plants grown for food will be placed.” This would apply to vegetable garden or maybe even herb gardens if the herbs will be eaten.

We would love to hear from you!
Please tell us what other programs you’d like to see at the training facility.

• Is there a particular pest or group of pests you’d like to see covered?
• Are there other relevant subjects, such as pesticide safety, pesticide formulations, equipment calibration and maintenance, pest management in specialized facilities, integrated pest management, etc. that you’d like to learn more about?
• Do you feel you or your employees would benefit from online training offered through the training facility?

Email your comments to Patty Alder at patricia_alder@ncsu.edu; please type “comment” in the subject line.
CLOVER MITES

Clover mites are occasional invaders that can become a problem in early spring and sometimes in the fall. You may soon begin receiving calls from customers wondering what these little bright red creatures are.

Clover mites are tiny (1/30-inch long), red to reddish-brown, oval-shaped mites. Clover mites, as do other arachnids, have 8 legs. They hold the front pair of legs straight out in front of the head. Many people actually mistake this pair of legs for antennae.

Clover mites do not bite nor do they burrow under the skin (your customers may ask you)! They are strictly plant feeders. Hosts include grasses, clover, and dandelion, to name a few.

Most heavy outbreaks occur in the early spring, especially around highly fertilized lawns. The mites may invade homes and can leave a reddish-brown stain if crushed.

Control. An 18”-24” grass and weed-free zone around the structure’s perimeter can greatly reduce the number of invading clover mites. Treat a 5-10 foot wide area of ground along the foundation, as well as an 18-24 inch wide vertical band of the foundation wall with an appropriately labeled residual liquid insecticide.

Many plants are actually unattractive to clover mites, including geranium, marigold, zinnia, salvia, rose, chrysanthemum petunia, juniper, spruce, yew and barberry. Planting these non-attractive plants in the weed-free zone will help reduce the number of clover mites around the structure. You may also recommend that your customers contact their county Cooperative Extension Center for advice on proper fertilization of their lawns.

The application of insecticides indoor for clover mites is not warranted. Your customer should simply use a vacuum cleaner to collect any mites found indoors. Care should be taken not to crush the mites. The vacuum bag should be sealed in a disposable plastic bag before throwing it away.

FACILITY OFFERS TRAINING FOR REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS

NCSU Structural Pest Management Training Facility has partnered with NCDA&CS and NCPMA to provide training for North Carolina real estate professionals on the Wood-Destroying Insect Report (WDIR 100). The WDIR is used by potential buyers to aid in the decision-making process on the real estate purchase. On reason we developed this course was in response to comments by the pest management industry that real estate agents (and their clients) often do not understand how to read the WDIR and its requirements or the limitations for what is or is not allowed during an inspection. We have also partnered with Wake County Extension to offer real estate agent training on understanding septic system inspections. To find out more about these classes or to register, please visit our website at http://entomology.ncsu.edu/training and click on “Understanding the Wood-Destroying Insect Report.”