

Fire Ant Control Methods around Pets

Paul R. Nester

Extension Program Specialist–Integrated Pest Management,
 Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

The red imported fire ant can be a serious health problem for backyard pets. Fire ants can sting and, occasionally, kill small animals. According to a survey completed by veterinarians, small animals and pets are treated more frequently than any other type of animal for fire-ant-related health injuries.

Fire ants are attracted to pet food. They can blanket a food bowl, making it impossible for pets to eat. When disturbed, mounds produce thousands of stinging fire ants, creating a potentially dangerous situation for pets while playing, running, or digging near a fire ant mound.

Very young animals, caged animals, or those that are old and have difficulty moving are most likely to be stung (see *Protecting Penned Animals from Fire Ants*). Animals with open sores, “hot spots,” irritated skin, bandaged wounds, or limited mobility from other health problems are more vulnerable and attractive to fire ants. Such animals are also more likely to suffer severe reactions because of their weakened state.

Fire ants most readily sting body parts with little or no hair such as the ears, eyes, muzzle, and the tender skin of the abdomen. If your pet is attacked, remove it as quickly as you can from the source of the fire ants. Then remove any fire ants still on

your pet. Do not try to spray the fire ants off with a water hose; they will hang on with their jaws and sting repeatedly. Brush them off quickly, protecting yourself from potential stings. Depending on the severity of the attack, treatment by a veterinarian may be necessary (see *Diagnosing and Treating Animals for Red Imported Fire Ant Injury*).

CONTROL

Remove your pet from the ant-infested area when applying any type of product. The Two-Step Method can effectively control fire ants in heavily infested areas (see *Fire Ant Control: The Two-Step Method and Other Approaches*). This approach begins by broadcasting fire ant bait containing one or more of the following active ingredients—abamectin, fenoxycarb, hydramethylnon, indoxacarb, pyriproxyfen, metaflumazone, s-methoprene, or spinosad—over the entire yard. Troublesome mounds near pets or other high-traffic areas are then treated individually with an approved dust, granular, or liquid insecticide plus water. Individual mound treatments provide quick control of major nuisance mounds while bait treatments provide slower, more complete control of fire ant activity over the whole area. **When applying fire ant control products to areas where pets live, read and follow the label instructions for safety and best results.**

Several “organic” fire ant control methods can be safe to use around your pets. For recently pro-



duced mounds, pouring 2 to 3 gallons of very hot or boiling water over the mound will provide 50 to 60 percent control. Insecticide products containing d-limonene, pine oil, pyrethrins (or a combination pyrethrin plus diatomaceous earth or silica dioxide), or spinosad can adequately control individual fire ant mounds (see *Natural, Organic, and Alternative Methods for Imported Fire Ant Management*).

When applied as directed, broadcast-applied bait products are unlikely to harm pets. This is due to the relative low toxicity of the insecticides used, the small percentage of active ingredient used in baits, and low application rates. When applied at the recommended rate (usually 1 to 1½ pounds per acre), thoroughly scatter the baits so they are barely visible on the ground and unlikely to contact pets. If the fire ants are active, worker ants will rapidly pick up baits and remove them to underground nests, away from people, birds, and pets.

Despite their relatively low toxicity, always use caution when applying baits to pet territories. Remove the pets during application and take care to sweep up any small piles of spilled bait product. When ingested in large enough quantities, some baits can be toxic to pets. Store them properly so they are inaccessible to pets. Do not leave visible piles of bait on top of fire ant mounds, as this may tempt some pets to feed on the product.

Thoroughly water dust, granular, and liquid insecticides into the mound and let them dry before allowing pets nearby. Using baits as a mound treatment, or using granular products without watering the granular product in (never water bait products) may pose a hazard. Pets can easily come into contact when high concentrations of pesticides remain on the surface.

For more information regarding fire ant management, see Extension publications *Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Urban Areas*, *Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control*, or *Fire Ant Control: The Two-Step Method and Other Approaches* posted on <http://AgriLifeBookstore.org>.

The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is implied.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

AgriLifeExtension.tamu.edu

More Extension publications can be found at *AgriLifeBookstore.org*

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran status.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This fact sheet, first released in May 2002, was authored by Nathan Riggs, Extension Agent—Integrated Pest Management (Fire Ant Project). Wizzie Brown and Molly Keck, Extension Program Specialists—Integrated Pest Management, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, reviewed recent revisions.

REFERENCES

Protecting Penned Animals from Fire Ants

http://fireant.tamu.edu/files/2013/02/043_penned_animals.pdf

Diagnosing and Treating Animals for Red Imported Fire Ant Injury

u.tamu.edu/ento-004

Fire Ant Control: The Two-Step Method and Other Approaches

www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/ento-034.htm

Natural, Organic, and Alternative Methods for Imported Fire Ant Management

u.tamu.edu/ento-009

Managing Red Imported Fire Ants in Urban Areas

www.extension.org/pages/11004/managing-imported-fire-ants-in-urban-areas-printable-version

Broadcast Baits for Fire Ant Control

www.agrilifebookstore.org/product-p/e-628.htm