



**Very High Risk / Impact
in all regions of the Okanagan**

Poses a significant threat and is
very limited in extent

European Fire Ant

Myrmica rubra

DESCRIPTION

- Red/brown in color; often with a darker head and lighter abdomen and thorax
- 4-5 mm in length
- Behaviour consists of rapid swarming and readily stinging if nest site is disturbed

HABITAT

Provincial biologists first confirmed the presence of the European fire ant in British Columbia in 2010. Known populations have been confirmed in Burnaby, Vancouver, Richmond, North Vancouver, Maple Ridge, Chilliwack, Victoria and Courtenay. An outbreak has also been confirmed in Naramata (South Okanagan); this is considered to be a unique, isolated case as generally the BC interior is too dry for them to survive.

European fire ants prefer to nest in warm and humid/moist areas, as well as under objects including paving stones, wood on the ground, lawn ornaments and clutter. They occur in lawns and raised garden beds. Nests do not form obvious above ground mounds, although a small amount of disturbed soil may be visible for young nests (first 2 weeks only). The most likely method of introduction and spread of European fire ant is through the movement of infested garden and landscape material such as soil, mulch and potted plants.



LOOK-A-LIKE

European fire ants can be confused with **Thatching ants** (*Formica ravidia*), and **Manica invidiosa**, which are larger (8mm and 5-7mm respectively). The European fire ant is identifiable by its two waist segments (our native ant only has one), and two backward pointing spines and stinger (visible with a magnifying glass). Landowners trying to identify fire ants on their property can send a sample for free identification through the Ministry of Agriculture.



IMPACT AND RISKS

- The European fire ant is an aggressive, swarming ant that can deliver a painful sting when disturbed. In uncommon cases this has led to allergic reactions that have required medical treatment.
- Colonies can reach densities of up to four nests per square meter, rendering gardens, lawns and parks unusable for normal activities.
- The ant also has the potential to impact agricultural crops and has been shown to displace native ants in their natural environment.

PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

- Eradication may not be possible but there are a number of things that can be done to minimize the impact of this species and prevent its spread.
- Make your property less favourable to fire ants by avoiding or minimizing lawn and garden watering, and removing objects that trap heat and moisture.
- Do not move soil, mulch or plants from infested areas.
- Bait with boric acid.
- Raise awareness in your community.

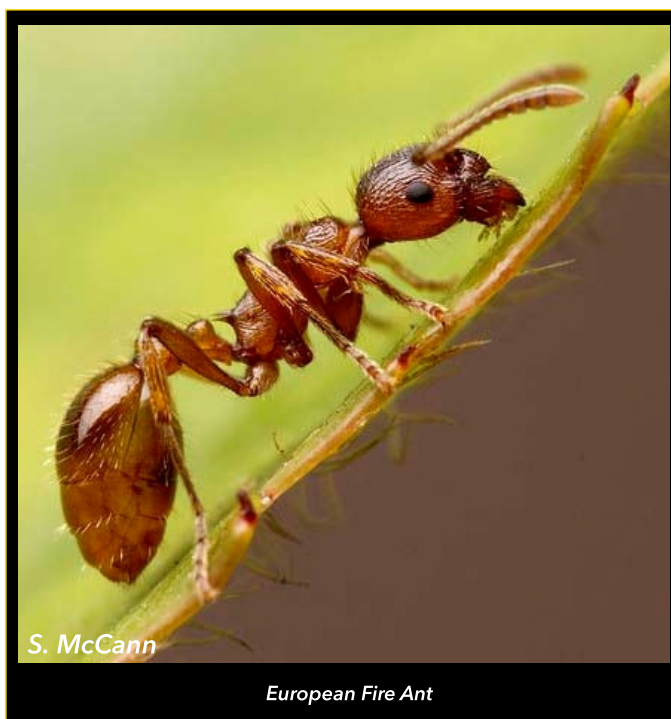
TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL

- If you think you have European fire ants on your property the first thing you should do is confirm their identity. Some native species of ant look similar or may behave in a similar way so it's important to confirm which species you have before attempting any control methods. Identification services are provided free of charge.
- Collect a sample and send to Dr. Robert Higgins at Thompson Rivers University. Instructions on how to do this can be found here: http://faculty.tru.ca/rhiggins/shipping_ants_for_identification.htm
- Dr. Higgins can provide advice on appropriate control measures once identification is confirmed.



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