

Fire Ant Abatement



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Fire ants are nuisance insects. They sting humans, their pets and their livestock. They also cause electrical outages in air-conditioning units and other electrical devices. Mowing can be hazardous due to the mounds the ants build and the stings they inflict. Their aggressive nature makes them easy to identify.

Killing fire ants without understanding the basic biology of the insect can be difficult. The red imported fire ant (RIFA), *Solenopsis invicta*, is the species of fire ant that is causing problems throughout the southeastern U.S. A native of South America, RIFA is similar to other ant species. At the center of every mound or colony is a queen or queens. If you want to kill the colony, you have to kill the queen. (See FSA7036, *Fire Ant Control in Two Easy Steps*, for more information.)

Eradication of this pest is not possible, but we can learn to minimize the impact on our lives. Through the use of an abatement program, fire ant problems can be minimized.

What Is Abatement?

Abatement is the process of putting something away from you. A fire ant abatement program is, therefore, the process of putting fire ants away from you – to minimize their impact on your everyday life.

Fire ant abatement programs may include the following:

- Community education
- Reduced-cost control products program
- Hiring a pest control operator to treat a neighborhood or community

- Neighborhood abatement programs
 - * Individual neighborhoods
 - * Citywide neighborhoods
 - * City-run programs

Which Approach Is Suitable for Your Area?

In deciding which approach to fire ant abatement is suitable for your area, you need to consider two things – the cost of the program and the time commitment needed to run it effectively. The larger the program, the more organizational skills are needed. **Commitment is necessary for a fire ant program to be effective.**

Experience with similar programs throughout Arkansas has shown that it is important to start small and evaluate the program periodically.

Program Types

Education of the Community



Informing the community through public meetings, area displays and demonstrations is effective. Correct use of the products involved in the “two-step” method of fire ant control is important. The two-step involves the use of baits and contact insecticides (see FSA7036, *Fire Ant Control in Two Easy Steps*). Often, once people are educated about the basic biology of fire ants and the pesticides available, they are more receptive to development of other abatement programs, such as a reduced-cost program or a neighborhood abatement program.



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Reduced-Cost Program



An option for communities or organizations that don't have time or money to commit to a neighborhood program but wish to help people in the community is a reduced-cost program. Control products are bought in quantity so that prices to the end-user are reduced. The only price markups are transportation costs or similar fees.

Neighborhood Abatement Program



Neighborhood abatement programs are for those neighborhoods that have the time, money and organizational skills to run a program. Program sizes vary, but several types have emerged throughout states that are fire ant infested.

- **Individual neighborhoods** – Individuals or neighborhood associations that determine fire ants are a problem they can work on together.
- **Citywide neighborhoods** – Entire citywide neighborhoods.

Hire a pest control operator – Hiring a pest control operator is an option for neighborhoods or communities that prefer to leave the use of pesticides to the professional. Be sure the pest control operator is a licensed operator who knows about the two-step program.

Bait application day – Residents of the neighborhood purchase the correct pesticides on their own. Then, on an agreed-upon day or week, the entire neighborhood treats for fire ants.

- **City program** – The city voluntarily takes the responsibility to run the program. Fees are collected through the city treasury, etc.

An effective program uses **block coordinators** who serve as intermediaries between the applicator and the homeowner. Their duties include the following:

- * Organizing the neighborhoods into blocks,

- * Signing up participants and
- * Answering general questions about pesticides used in the program.

Act 590

Enabling legislation was passed in 1997. The legislation allows neighborhoods, cities or counties to petition and create fire ant abatement districts. The legislation provides a framework for an effectively managed program, with oversight written into the legislation. (The text of Act 590 can be found at <http://www.arkagriculture.org/insects/Fireants/abatement/act590.htm>.)

Selling the Program



Each community has a different perspective about the fire ant problem. To be effective, a program has to be what the community – be it a neighborhood or city – wants for their community.

Decide if your neighborhood or community wants to minimize the impact of fire ants by doing the following:

- Research the control options available – bait insecticides vs. contact insecticides.
- Talk to your neighbors – Are they concerned about fire ants?
- Conduct a general meeting to find out what people want to do about the fire ant problem.
- Collect names of interested people.
- Follow up with more meetings and **MAKE A DECISION**.

Educational materials and assistance related to community development are available from the Community and Economic Development Section of the Cooperative Extension Service. Topics include Leadership Development, Organizational Skills, Workshops, Facilitators, Problem Solving and Leadership Development Workshops. For more information, visit our web site, www.uaex.uada.edu.

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