

Emergency Response

Red imported fire ants

Solenopsis invicta



August 2025

Fire Ant Awareness and Response Communication Toolkit for Schools

Practical guidance and communication resources to help schools prepare, prevent, respond, and recover.

Purpose:

This toolkit supports New South Wales schools to raise awareness of the risks posed by invasive red imported fire ants (fire ants), to protect the health and safety of staff, students, and the broader school community. It is relevant for all schools, regardless of whether fire ants have been detected locally. It includes general information and communication resources including social media and newsletter content for schools to use.

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Background

- Fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) have been detected four times in NSW since November 2023, with nests discovered in **Murwillumbah** on 24 November 2023, **Wardell** on 19 January 2024, **Tweed Heads South** on 2 July 2025, and an interception of infested turf at **Clunes** on 13 November 2024.
- Swift action from the NSW Fire Ant Team has destroyed the fire ant populations found in NSW. The NSW Fire Ant team works closely with the National Fire Ant Eradication Program to prevent fire ants from re-entering NSW.
- Vigilance among the NSW community, particularly in the north, is crucial as human activity remains the primary cause of fire ant spread. Schools have a huge role to play in fire ant detection with staff, students and families keeping a lookout for fire ants in the playground, at home and in public spaces.

Key messages:

A serious threat to Australia: Fire ants are one of the world's worst invasive species. Up to 97 % of Australia is suitable habitat for fire ants. It is estimated fire ants may reduce biodiversity in up to 45% of birds, 38% of mammals, 69% of reptiles and 95% of frogs. ([Source](#))

Fire ants will have impacts: Fire ants can have significant impacts on our health, lifestyle, environment, industries, and economy. Wider infestation could cost Australia more than \$2 billion per year in control measures and losses, more than feral cats, wild dogs, foxes, camels, rabbits and cane toads combined.

Fire ants are prohibited matter: Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW under the [Biosecurity Act 2015](#). It is an offence to treat, move, or have possession of fire ants in NSW unless you are authorised.

Dangerous and aggressive: Fire ants are aggressive, and they have a severe, burning sting that is extremely painful. Humans are at risk of tens or hundreds of stings within seconds from swarming fire ants, if a nest is disturbed. Their sting can cause painful pustules and increase the risk of anaphylactic allergic reactions. In heavily infested areas, around 30% of residents will be stung each year.

Fire ants in Australia: First discovered in Australia in Brisbane in 2001, fire ants have spread to occupy 1,068,000 ha in southeast Queensland.

National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP): The [NFAEP](#) manages the \$593m plan to eradicate fire ants from Australia by 2032. New South Wales is contributing \$95m (16%) to the national plan between 2023-2027, this is more than any other state or territory.

How fire ants spread: Fire ants are not marching; they are being carried. The spread of fire ants is driven primarily by human activity, mostly the movement of materials used for landscaping, development, and agriculture, such as soil, turf, mulch, hay, potted plants, growing media and machinery. A full list of fire ant carriers can be found [here](#).

Movement controls and legal obligations: The current [Biosecurity \(Fire Ant\) Emergency Order](#) outlines your obligations when moving fire ant carrier materials from fire ant infested areas in southeast Queensland and northern NSW, and the fire ant movement control areas at South Murwillumbah and Wardell.

General biosecurity duty: Under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (the Act) all residents and organisations have a [general duty](#) to be aware of their surroundings and take action to prevent the introduction and spread of pests, diseases, weeds and contaminants (non-living things on or absorbed by biosecurity matter or carrier).

Working together to protect NSW: Let's keep working together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information visit: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

What are fire ants:

- Fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) are an invasive and highly destructive species, originally from South America.
- They are small (2-6mm), with a mix of different sized worker ants in each nest. Much smaller in comparison than native ants like the red bull ant (*Myrmecia gulosa*) which can grow up to 30 mm long.
- Fire ants are dark reddish-brown with a darker brown-black abdomen.
- They are aggressive and swarm in large numbers, stinging repeatedly when disturbed. Their sting can cause painful welts and allergic reactions.
- Nests can appear as flattish patches to mounds of soil up to 40 cm high, with no obvious (visible?) entry or exit hole.

- Fire ants have the potential to cost Australia \$2b annually (in damage to agriculture, infrastructure and public health) if they become established.

What to do if you suspect fire ants:

If you suspect the presence of fire ants:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW, and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them. Avoid disturbing fire ants to prevent injury and further spread.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call us immediately on the **NSW Biosecurity Helpline 1800 680 244** or on the website www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.

Communication actions for schools

This toolkit is designed to help school managers to prepare their school community for the threat of fire ants. To make this easier, communication actions have been grouped into three levels. Each level reflects a different situation and comes with its own set of recommended responses and resources:

1. **Preparation & prevention:** Recommended actions and resources to raise awareness
2. **Response:** What to do if fire ants are detected on your school grounds or nearby
3. **Recovery:** Following a detection and subsequent treatment and surveillance

Include fire ants in your emergency management planning

To strengthen your school's preparedness, fire ant risks should be formally included in your Emergency Management Plan. This may include allocating key roles and responsibilities (e.g. a warden), establishing important contacts, briefings focused on pre-emergency (**prevention**) during emergency (**response**) and post-emergency (**recovery**), identifying staff trained in first aid, and ensuring anaphylaxis management plans are up to date and easy to access.

Communicating this within the school

You can communicate this information internally by:

- Including fire ant response planning as a standing item in staff meetings
- Updating your contractors and staff on what they should do if they suspect fire ants
- Providing short briefings or induction materials for new staff or casuals
- Displaying key contacts and first aid information in relevant areas (e.g. staffrooms, sick bays, front offices)
- Incorporating fire ant response roles and responsibilities in emergency drills

1. Preparation & prevention: Recommended actions and resources

Communication approach

Proactive planning and awareness are key to reducing the risk of fire ants affecting your school community. Even if no detections have occurred nearby, it's important to take steps now to prepare, inform staff and students, and build resilience.

This section includes suggested actions and resources to help schools:

- Establish the current risk level
- Raise awareness of fire ants and their risks
- Educate students and staff on how to identify and report them
- Communicate general information through newsletters, social media, and displays
- By taking preventative steps early, schools can respond faster and more effectively if fire ants are ever detected in the future.
- Encourage citizen science approach with students utilising tools such as iNaturalist.

Identify the risks to your school and property

Risk matrix

The risk matrix is tailored to help principals, teachers, and facilities staff systematically identify, assess, and manage specific fire ant risks in educational settings, if fire ants are detected in school grounds or the surrounding area. This matrix follows standard school risk assessment formats and addresses key hazards, impacts, likelihood, consequences, and control actions.

Threat	Impact	Likelihood	Consequence	Risk	Actions for school
Fire ant nest in playgrounds or sports fields	Painful stings (incl. risk of anaphylaxis), disruption of activities, psychological distress	Possible	Major (medical treatment required, school closure)	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular inspection of grounds• Prompt nest reporting & treatment• Exclusion signage/fencing• First aid/medical plans for allergic reactions
Fire ants on school excursions or events	Stings during field trips or off-site events	Possible	Major (possible medical emergencies, reputational impact)	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excursion risk assessment includes pest check• Carry first aid kit/epipen
Fire ants inside classrooms or buildings	Stings to students/staff, property damage (electrical faults)	Unlikely	Moderate (minor injury, repairs needed)	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Block entry points, inspect frequently

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: staff, cleaners, students • Rapid maintenance response for repairs
Fire ants in garden beds/ bushland	Stings during lessons or gardening, risk to environmental projects	Possible	Moderate (minor injury, disruption)	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational posters & teacher alerts • Supervision • Avoid known/ suspected nests • Enclosed shoes policy
Impact on school infrastructure	Damage to electrical systems, equipment, irrigation	Rare	Moderate (interruption, repair costs)	Low–Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds/facilities inspections • Prompt reporting & treatment

Matrix Key:

- Likelihood: Rare, Unlikely, Possible, Likely, Almost Certain
- Consequence: Minor, Moderate, Major, Severe
- Risk Rating: Low, Medium, High, Extreme

Evaluate risks and take action:

Risk for fire ants will be higher if:

- you bring in fire ant carrier materials (including turf, soil, mulch and plants) from southeast Queensland, a *fire ant infested area*, or *fire ant movement control area*. These are shown in red, orange or yellow on this map. This is the easiest and most common way to spread fire ants.
- the school is located within (or close to) a *fire ant infested area* or *fire ant movement control area*. These are shown in red, orange or yellow on this map. Fire ants can spread naturally through flights of up to 5 km.
- you store fire ant carrier materials in sunny, open areas of lawn, or in areas where soil has been disturbed, imported or moved. The longer a carrier material is stored in suitable areas, the higher the risk of a queen landing on it and starting a new colony.

Prepare for and **prevent** fire ants from entering your area and your school by:

- educating your staff, students and community about the impacts of fire ants, how to identify them, and how to report them. Use the resources below. For example, staff involved in asset management can use the Asset Management Poster to guide decision making and processes.
- identify high risk materials and mitigate risk (take actions to reduce the risk of fire ants living in or being carried).
- ensuring you comply with the current Biosecurity Emergency Order when moving fire ant carrier materials.
- check for ants in any imported hay, turf, mulch, soil, potted plants, sand, gravel or agricultural machinery. Be on the lookout for signs of fire ants.

- include fire ants in your Emergency Management Plan.
- consider alternative suppliers, storage locations, and routes for fire ant carrier materials. By avoiding suppliers and transport routes in known infested areas, the fire ant risk is reduced.
- stay up to date, by signing up for regular [email updates](#) on fire ant movements and changes to the Order. Download the new BioResponse NSW app from your app store to access alerts, check locations, find guidance and tools to help manage fire ant risks.
- ask NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) for a fire ant briefing/webinar for staff. Contact our Communications and Engagement Officer, Tommy Wainwright on 0484 575 604 or email tommy.wainwright@dpi.nsw.gov.au.

Ensure your staff and students are aware of their obligations to report fire ants and take actions to prevent their spread. Anyone in NSW who suspects fire ants must:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW, and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them. Avoid disturbing fire ants to prevent injury and further spread.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call us immediately on the NSW Biosecurity Helpline 1800 680 244 or on the website www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.

Communications resources

Newsletter content

Use newsletter content to introduce fire ant awareness in your school community.

See **suggested newsletter content** in [Appendix 1a](#).

Social posts

If your school uses social media to share messages to your community, consider the following options:

1. Share relevant Facebook posts from the [NSW Biosecurity](#) or [NSW Agriculture](#) pages.
2. Use the social media templates provided in Appendix 1b to share on your channels.

See **social media templates** in [Appendix 1b](#).

Resources for managers and staff

Resources targeted to school staff: teachers, administration, executive, maintenance.

See **resources for managers and staff** in [Appendix 1c](#).

Resources for students

Educational resources for student information or for teachers to incorporate into units of work, projects or ad hoc lessons.

See **primary school resources** in [Appendix 1d](#).

See **secondary school resources** in [Appendix 1e](#).

See **preschool/daycare/OSHC resources** in [Appendix 1f](#).

Additional resources and links

See **additional resources** in [Appendix 1g](#)

2. Response: What to do if fire ants are detected

Communication approach

A fire ant detection on or near school grounds requires a calm, coordinated response. The school's priority during this phase is to protect students, staff, and visitors while ensuring timely reporting and clear communication with your school community.

What to expect if fire ants are detected

If you discover suspected fire ants or a nest on school property, please vacate the area, restrict entry the area with temporary barriers and signage, and call 1800 680 244 immediately, or use the online form at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.

Following preliminary assessment, the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and the National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP) will respond immediately to:

- take sufficient samples of the suspect ants.
- confirm identification of sampled ants by a diagnostic entomologist, usually by remote microscope network.
- Notify the school of the outcome.

If the result is negative, you may remove the barriers and notify a pest control contractor if you wish to take further action.

If positive identification is confirmed, the specially trained NSW DPIRD Fire Ant Team and officers from the NFAEP will:

- attend the site to conduct a thorough assessment of the nest. This includes further sampling for genetic analysis, visual inspection to assess any signs of reproduction (winged ants (alates), eggs, larvae and pupae).
- the nest/s will be treated by direct nest injection (DNI).
- survey the area to locate any further nests, or signs that the fire ants may have spread. This may include both human and odour detection dog teams.
- provide advice to the school on activating your communications tool kit.
- commence investigations into the likely source of the fire ants, whether it was via natural flight or arrived through human assisted movement of fire ant carriers. This may involve obtaining records for materials imported onto the site.
- apply approved fire ant bait treatments to affected and surrounding areas. These treatments are safe when used as directed and pose minimal risk to humans and pets.
- monitor the site over the coming months to ensure the effectiveness of the treatment and to detect any further activity.
- we will work closely with the school to schedule these activities at times that minimise disruption to students and staff.

Communications resources

Newsletter content

Use newsletter content to notify the school community of a nearby fire ant detection.

See **suggested newsletter content** in [Appendix 2a](#).

Draft email to parents

Use to inform parents of a fire ant detection.

See **draft email to parents** in [Appendix 2b](#).

Social posts

If your school uses social media to disseminate messages to your community, consider the following options:

1. Share relevant Facebook posts from the [NSW Biosecurity](#) or [NSW Agriculture](#) pages.
2. Use the social media templates provided in Appendix 1b to share on your channels.

See **social media templates** in [Appendix 2c](#).

Resources for managers and staff

Resources targeted to school staff: teachers, administration, executive, maintenance.

See **resources for managers and staff** in [Appendix 1c](#).

Resources for students

Educational resources for student information or for teachers to incorporate into units of work, projects or ad hoc lessons.

See **primary school resources** in [Appendix 1d](#).

See **secondary school resources** in [Appendix 1e](#).

See **preschool/daycare/OSHC resources** in [Appendix 1f](#).

Additional resources and links

See **additional resources** in [Appendix 1g](#)

3. Recovery: Following a detection or treatment

Communication approach

Once a fire ant detection has been treated and the immediate risk is managed, it's important for schools to shift focus to recovery. This phase helps rebuild confidence within the school community, support wellbeing, and ensure continued vigilance.

Recovery actions may include:

- Communicating with parents and carers to provide reassurance and updates
 - Supporting staff and students who may have concerns or experienced an incident
 - Continuing education and awareness activities to promote safe behaviours
 - Updating emergency plans and capturing lessons learned
 - This section provides practical steps and communication tools to help schools move forward confidently and maintain trust with their community.
-

Communications resources

Newsletter content

Use newsletter content to maintain fire ant awareness in your school community following detections.

See **suggested newsletter content** in [Appendix 3a](#).

Use the following email content after treatment and the situation is under control. Restoring confidence is critical. Here's an example of how to communicate that:

See **suggested follow-up email content** in [Appendix 3b](#)

Social posts

If your school uses social media to reach your community, consider the following options:

1. Share relevant Facebook posts from the [NSW Biosecurity](#) or [NSW Agriculture](#) pages.
2. Use the social media templates provided to share on your channels.

See **social media templates** in [Appendix 3c](#).

Resources for managers and staff

Resources targeted to school staff: teachers, administration, executive, maintenance.

See **resources for managers and staff** in [Appendix 1c](#).

Resources for students

Educational resources for student information or for teachers to incorporate into units of work, projects or ad hoc lessons.

See **primary school resources** in [Appendix 1d](#).

See **secondary school resources** in [Appendix 1e](#).

See **preschool/daycare/OSHC resources** in [Appendix 1f](#).

[Additional resources and links](#)

See **additional resources** in [Appendix 1g](#)

Implementation suggestions

- Display posters in high-traffic areas (entrances, staff rooms, playgrounds).
- Schedule annual staff briefings and student lessons on fire ant awareness.
- Incorporate fire ant vigilance into playground supervision checklists.
- Encourage families to check their own gardens and report suspicious ants.

Conclusion

Keeping your school community informed and prepared

By raising awareness, planning ahead, and responding confidently, schools can play an important role in stopping the spread of fire ants and protecting their communities. Use this toolkit as a practical resource to guide your school through prevention, response, and recovery.

Further information

Call the NSW DPIRD Biosecurity helpline if you suspect fire ants: **1800 680 244**.

© State of New South Wales through Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 2025. The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (August 2025). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that the information upon which they rely is up to date and to check the currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Regional NSW or the user's independent adviser.

Appendix 1a:

Newsletter content

Beware of fire ants in NSW

NSW schools are urged to remain vigilant for fire ants, following detections at Murwillumbah, Wardell and Tweed Heads in northern NSW. One of the world's most destructive invasive species, fire ants can have significant impacts on our health, lifestyle, environment, industries, and economy.

Fire ants are present in areas of Southeast Queensland. While they do spread naturally, the highest risk for NSW is through the movement of fire ant carrier materials such as soil, mulch, turf, potted plants and machinery.

Students, parents and staff are urged to be on the lookout for fire ants. If you suspect fire ants:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015, and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call the hotline on 1800 680 244, submit an online form.

Let's be proactive and work together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information on fire ants, identification, nests and how we are managing the threat to NSW, visit: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

For regular updates, sign up to the NSW Fire Ants Update newsletter [here](#).

DL Graphic for use in communications:

Beware of fire ants
Information for school students

How to check for fire ants

- ▲ nests are **flat patches or mounds** of soil to **40cm high**
- ▲ nests have **no obvious entrance holes**
- ▲ may be **loose or crumbly soil**, honeycomb inside
- ▲ disturbed ants will **swarm quickly** and sting
- ▲ fire ants are **small**, only **2-6mm**
- ▲ there will be **different sized ants** in the nest
- ▲ **dark red-brown**, darker brown-black abdomen

SIZE GUIDE

- Red Bull Ant *Myrmecia gulosa* 15-30mm
- Fire ants *Solenopsis invicta* 2-6mm

Ants actual size

LEAVE IT
Do not destroy or treat nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW

SNAP IT
Ask an adult to help to safely take a clear photo or video for identification

CALL IT
Call 1800 680 244, or submit online form www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants

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Appendix 1b:

Social media posts

Use the templates below to raise general awareness in your school community.

Social post 1

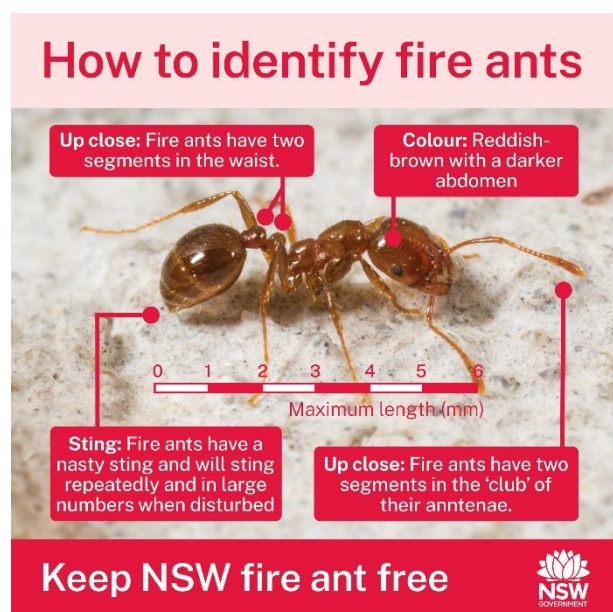
Our school community is urged to be on the lookout for fire ants, following detections at Murwillumbah, Wardell and Tweed Heads in northern NSW. One of the world's most destructive invasive species, fire ants can have significant impacts on our health, lifestyle, environment, industries, and economy.

Fire ants are established in Queensland. While they do spread naturally, the highest risk for NSW is the movement of fire ant carrier materials such as soil, mulch, turf, potted plants and machinery.

Students, parents and staff are urged to be on the lookout for fire ants. If you suspect fire ants:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015, and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call the hotline on 1800 680 244, submit an online form.

Let's be proactive and work together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information on fire ants visit: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.



Social post 2

Did you know? NSW has a dedicated Fire Ant Team located across NSW, ready for any potential fire ant incursion into NSW. Their focus is on preparation, prevention, and early detection.

NSW DPIRD have received over 2,700 calls and 1,690 official fire ant reports from the community since November 2023. Only four of these turned out to be fire ants. Every call is investigated, and a network of diagnostic microscopes is on standby to send images to entomologists for diagnosis. If fire ants are confirmed in NSW, the team will be on site within 24 hours to assess and destroy the nest.

More than 3,000 surveillance events during this time and proactive sentinel surveillance at high-risk sites is ongoing.

Let's keep working together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.



Social post 3

Fire ants restrict everyday family and school activities such as outdoor play and sporting activities, because backyards, parks, playgrounds, beaches and sports grounds become unusable.

Communities in fire ant-infested areas have no choice but to change their habits to avoid exposure to these nasty ants.

Playing sport, hosting events, field trips and even going barefoot, wearing thongs, sitting on the grass, or even standing still for too long becomes problematic. Mowing and gardening can also be a nightmare.

The impact of fire ants is not restricted to people. Pets and domestic animals can also be stung and injured and may have allergic reactions or be blinded by exposure to the venom.

For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

Fire ants will impact on our health, environment, industries and lifestyle.

Help us keep fire ants out of NSW.



Appendix 1c

Resources for managers and staff

Resources targeting school staff: teachers, administration, executive, maintenance.

Document	Type	Purpose
Asset management guide	SP	For staff managing grounds, equipment, vehicles
Procurement guide	SP	For staff making purchase decisions
Suppliers guide	SP	For staff dealing with external suppliers
A3 staff poster	SP	For staff rooms
A3 student poster	SP	For classrooms and common areas
General resources	Web	More resources: carriers, health, FAQ, links
Newsletter sign up	Web	Receive regular updates from NSW Fire Ant Team
Newsletter graphic/social tiles	SP	DL flyer/promotional slide for newsletters & social media tiles
Poster Zip file	SP	All schools posters in a .zip file

Legend: **SP** – Self-print or screen resource | **Ed** – Teaching resource | **Web** – web-based resource

Appendix 1d

Primary school resources

Document	Type	Purpose
Classroom resources	Ed	Investigate: fire ants (Stage 3)
Webinar	Ed	Webinar for Stages 3/4
Classroom resources	Ed	Science & Technology Unit of Work (Stage 3)
General resources	Web	More resources: carriers, health, FAQ, links
Poster Zip file	SP	All schools posters in a .zip file
Newsletter sign up	Web	Receive regular updates from NSW Fire Ant Team
Newsletter graphic/social tiles	SP	DL flyer/promotional slide for newsletters & social media tiles

*Legend: **SP** – Self-print or screen resource | **Ed** – Teaching resource | **Web** – web-based resource*

Appendix 1e

Secondary school resources

Document	Type	Purpose
<u>Classroom resources</u>	Ed	Secondary teaching materials
<u>Information pack</u>	Ed	DPIRD Schools Program introduction
<u>Webinar</u>	Ed	RIFA Stage 5/6 Video
<u>Classroom resources</u>	Ed	Citizen science/surveillance activities
<u>PowerPoint Presentation</u>	Ed	Fire ants presentation
<u>Worksheet</u>	Ed	RIFA worksheet
<u>Worksheet answer guide</u>	Ed	RIFA worksheet – answer guide
<u>Poster Zip file</u>	SP	All schools posters in a .zip file
<u>General resources</u>	Web	More resources: carriers, health, FAQ, links
<u>Newsletter sign up</u>	Web	Receive regular updates from NSW Fire Ant Team
<u>Newsletter graphic/social tiles</u>	SP	DL flyer/promotional slide for newsletters & social media tiles

*Legend: **SP** – Self-print or screen resource | **Ed** – Teaching resource | **Web** – web-based resource*

Appendix 1f

For preschool/daycare/OSHC

Document	Type	Purpose
<u>Asset management guide</u>	SP	For staff managing grounds, equipment, vehicles
<u>Procurement guide</u>	SP	For staff making purchase decisions
<u>Suppliers guide</u>	SP	For staff dealing with external suppliers
<u>A3 staff poster</u>	SP	For staff rooms
<u>A3 student poster</u>	SP	For classrooms and common areas
<u>General resources</u>	Web	More resources: carriers, health, FAQ, links
<u>Newsletter sign up</u>	Web	Receive regular updates from NSW Fire Ant Team
<u>Newsletter graphic/social tiles</u>	SP	DL flyer/promotional slide for newsletters & social media tiles
<u>Poster Zip file</u>	SP	All schools posters in a .zip file

*Legend: **SP** – Self-print or screen resource | **Ed** – Teaching resource | **Web** – web-based resource*

Appendix 1g

Additional resources and links

- [Report suspected fire ants](#)
- [Fire ant resources, factsheets and FAQ](#)
- [Health information for medical practitioners](#)
- [National Fire Ant Eradication Program](#)
- [Products used to treat fire ants in NSW](#)
- [National Geographic video on red imported fire ants](#)
- [Be a Biosecurity Warrior](#)
- [BioResponse NSW app](#)

Appendix 2a

Newsletter communications

Fire ants detected in our school/ found in our area

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) has notified our school that a positive detection of red imported fire ants (fire ants) has been discovered <on our school grounds> <in our immediate area>.

Residents and businesses should stay alert for fire ants after a nest was found in <insert location> on the <insert region>.

The NSW Fire Ant Team is working alongside the National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP) to complete initial activities, including treatment, surveillance, risk assessment, and tracing. Authorities now need to ensure no additional nests remain in the area.

We urge everyone in <insert location> and surrounding areas to remain vigilant and report any suspect fire ants and nests to NSW DPIRD immediately.

What has happened?

<Add situational detail supplied by NSW DPIRD>

What will happen next?

The NSW Fire Ant Team and officers from the NFAEP will:

- conduct a thorough site assessment and survey to locate any further nests or signs that the fire ants may have spread. This may include both human and odour detection dog teams.
- investigate the likely source of the fire ants, whether it was via natural flight or arrived through human assisted movement of fire ant carriers such as soil, turf or plants.
- apply approved fire ant bait treatments to affected and surrounding areas. These treatments are safe when used as directed and pose minimal risk to humans, wildlife and pets.
- monitor the site over the coming months to ensure the effectiveness of the treatment and to detect any further activity.

The school will work closely with authorities to schedule these activities at times that minimise disruption to students and staff.

Fire ants:

- or *Solenopsis invicta*, are one of the world's most destructive invasive species, and will have significant impacts on our health, lifestyle, environment, industries, and cost Australia \$2 billion annually if they become established.
- are native to South America.
- are small (2-6mm), with different sized ant workers in each nest. By comparison, the red bull ant (*Myrmecia gulosa*) may be up to 30 mm long.
- are dark reddish-brown with a darker brown-black abdomen.
- are aggressive, swarming in large numbers and stinging repeatedly when disturbed.

- make nests ranging from flattish patches of soil to mounds up to 40 cm high, with no obvious entry or exit hole.
- build nests in warm, open areas such as lawns, garden beds, and along the edges of footpaths, roads, and driveways, under objects such as timber, logs, rocks, pavers, and bricks, near utility pits and infrastructure, including water meters, and power poles.

Note: do not attempt to check a nest if you have a medical condition, are prone to insect allergies, or if children, pets, or vulnerable people are nearby.

If you suspect the presence of fire ants:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call the helpline on 1800 680 244 or submit an online report at www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.

Let's keep working together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information on fire ants, identification, nests and how we are managing the threat to NSW, visit: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

DL graphic for use in communications:

Beware of fire ants
Information for school students

NSW GOVERNMENT

How to check for fire ants

- ▲ nests are **flat patches or mounds** of soil to **40cm high**
- ▲ nests have **no obvious entrance holes**
- ▲ may be **loose or crumbly soil**, honeycomb inside
- ▲ disturbed ants will **swarm quickly** and sting
- ▲ fire ants are **small**, only **2-6mm**
- ▲ there will be **different sized ants** in the nest
- ▲ **dark red-brown, darker brown-black abdomen**

SIZE GUIDE

- Red Bull Ant *Myrmecia gulosa* 15-30mm
- Fire ants *Solenopsis invicta* 2-6mm

Ants actual size

LEAVE IT
Do not destroy or treat nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW

SNAP IT
Ask an adult to help to safely take a clear photo or video for identification

CALL IT
Call 1800 680 244, or submit online form www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants

Appendix 2b

Draft email to parents – Fire ant detection on school grounds

Subject Line: Important Update: Fire ants detected on school grounds

Body:

Dear parents and carers,

We are writing to inform you that fire ants have been detected on our school grounds. These invasive pests pose a health risk, particularly to children and staff who may unknowingly disturb their nests.

What we're doing:

We have taken immediate action and reported the detection to the relevant authorities. Treatment will be carried out under expert guidance, and affected areas have been clearly marked and restricted to ensure student and staff safety.

How we're keeping your children safe:

- Impacted areas have been closed off until declared safe.
- Staff have been briefed and are monitoring playgrounds and outdoor spaces closely.
- First aid officers are on alert for any allergic reactions, and anaphylaxis management plans are in place.
- We're sharing key fire ant awareness messages with students to help them identify and avoid nests

How you can help:

Please speak with your child about avoiding marked areas at school and encourage them to report any ants or nests they may see. You can also learn more about fire ants and how to report sightings at [\[official website or local authority link\]](#).

We understand that this may cause concern, and we are committed to keeping you informed as we manage the situation. If you have questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact the school office on [\[school contact number\]](#).

Thank you for your support in keeping our school safe.

Warm regards,

[\[Principal's Name\]](#)

[\[School Name\]](#)

Appendix 2c

Social media posts

Use the templates below if fire ants have been detected on school grounds or nearby.

Social post 1

Fire ants have been detected <on our school grounds> <in our local area> Fire ants pose a health risk, particularly to children and staff who may unknowingly disturb their nests.

We have taken immediate action and reported the detection to the relevant authorities. Affected areas have been clearly marked and restricted to ensure student and staff safety.

For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.



Social post 2

Can you pick the fire ant?

Test your skills and hit the emoji on the ant you think is *Solenopsis invicta*.

If you suspect fire ants, contact NSW DPI on 1800 680 244 or via the online form on the website www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.

ANSWERS: Posted in comments after 24 hours

Top left: Tetramorium

Top right: Fire ant

Bottom left: Funnel Ant

Bottom right: *Camponotus* spp.

Many ants look like fire ants, especially from a distance. A trained diagnostic entomologist is required to confirm the species. If you find ants that look like fire ants, give us a call on 1800 680 244.

Can you pick the fire ant?



Social post 3

Spotting nests is our best chance of finding fire ants. Fire ant nests can be up to 40cm high and may be higher in the cooler months to regulate the nest temperature. Be on the lookout for:

- flattish patches of bare soil up to mounds of soil reaching 40cm high
- nests with no obvious entrance/exit holes
- loose or crumbly soil, honeycomb appearance inside
- aggressive ants swarming quickly and in high numbers when disturbed, stinging simultaneously

Stay vigilant and contact us with any suspicious nest sightings to the NSW Biosecurity Helpline 1800 680 244 or www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.



Appendix 3a

Newsletter communications

Beware of fire ants in NSW

Following the detection of fire ants in <insert location> the school community urged to be on the lookout for fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*). While treatment and surveillance will continue, the risk of further detections remains, and it is common for nests to pop up months later.

One of the world's most destructive invasive species, fire ants can have significant impacts on our health, lifestyle, environment, industries, and economy.

Fire ants are present in areas of Southeast Queensland. While they do spread naturally, the highest risk for NSW is through the movement of fire ant carrier materials such as soil, mulch, turf, potted plants and machinery.

Students, parents and staff are urged to be on the lookout for fire ants. If you suspect fire ants:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW under the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015, and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call the hotline on 1800 680 244, submit an online form.

Let's be proactive and work together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information on fire ants, identification, nests and how we are managing the threat to NSW, visit: www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

For regular updates, sign up to the NSW Fire Ants Update newsletter [here](#).

DL Graphic for use in communications:

The graphic is a multi-sectioned informational poster. At the top left, a blue banner reads 'Beware of fire ants' in white, with a red sub-banner below it saying 'Information for school students'. To the right is a QR code and the NSW Government logo. The middle section, titled 'How to check for fire ants', lists six key indicators: nests are flat patches or mounds of soil to 40cm high; nests have no obvious entrance holes; soil may be loose or crumbly with a honeycomb pattern inside; disturbed ants swarm quickly and sting; fire ants are small (2-6mm); and there are different sized ants in the nest, with a dark red-brown, darker brown-black abdomen. This section includes images of a coin for scale and a magnified view of a fire ant. To the right of this are three red boxes with white text: 'LEAVE IT' (Do not destroy or treat nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW), 'SNAP IT' (Ask an adult to help to safely take a clear photo or video for identification), and 'CALL IT' (Call 1800 680 244, or submit online form www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants). At the bottom left is a 'SIZE GUIDE' comparing a Red Bull Ant (*Myrmecia gulosa*, 15-30mm) and Fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*, 2-6mm) with a ruler. The text 'Ants actual size' is at the bottom right.

Appendix 3b

Follow up email from school

Subject Line: Update: Fire Ants Treated – School Grounds Safe and Reopened

Body:

Dear parents and carers,

Following the detection of fire ants <on our school grounds> or <insert location>, we're pleased to let you know that treatment has been completed and the affected area has been declared safe by the relevant authorities.

We've worked closely with the authorities to ensure that all recommended safety measures were followed, and we've updated our emergency planning to help us respond quickly in future if needed.

The school community is now urged to be on the lookout for fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*). While treatment and surveillance will continue in the wider area, the risk of further detections remains, and it is common for nests to pop up months later.

What this means for your child:

- All areas are now safe for use and have reopened.
- We continue to monitor the grounds and maintain awareness of fire ant risks.
- Fire ant education activities will continue across the school to build student awareness.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation throughout this process. If you have any questions or ongoing concerns, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

Thank you for your continued trust in our school.

Kind regards,

[Principal's Name]

Appendix 3c

Social media posts

Use the templates below during recovery from fire ant incursions.

Social post 1

Did you know? NSW has a dedicated Fire Ant Team located across NSW, ready for any potential fire ant incursion into NSW. Their focus is on preparation, prevention, and early detection.

NSW DPIRD have received over 2,700 calls and 1,690 official fire ant reports from the community since November 2023. Only four of these turned out to be fire ants. Every call is investigated, and a network of diagnostic microscopes is on standby to send images to entomologists for diagnosis. If fire ants are confirmed in NSW, the team will be on site within 24 hours to assess and destroy the nest.

More than 3,000 surveillance events during this time and proactive sentinel surveillance at high-risk sites is ongoing.

For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.



Social post 2

Fire ants are an impressive and intimidating foe. The life cycle of fire ants is crucial to understand if we want to keep these destructive super-colonising pests out of NSW. Here's the short version:

It all starts with a queen. A new queen will embark on a nuptial flight, where she mates in the air with one male. While the boys then die, she will land within 5km, pull her wings off and bury herself underground to start her colony.

Her first brood will become workers within 30 days and commence building the vast networks of tunnels and chambers required to house the many thousands of eggs their queen will lay.

After around 6 months, she will produce reproductive 'alates' (new queens and males). Soon they will embark on their own nuptial flights by the thousands, spreading the colonies far and wide.

Let's keep working together to keep this pest out of NSW. For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.

The family we don't want in our school community



Social post 3

Have you ever wondered what it looks like inside a fire ant nest? Wonder no more!

A fire ant nest is an intricate maze of tunnels and brood chambers. Thousands of worker ants are busily caring for their queen, her eggs, larvae and pupae. These networks may stretch many meters underground.

There is no obvious entry and exit hole evident on fire ant nests. Workers use foraging tunnels which may extend up to 20 meters from the mound.

For more information or to report suspicious ants visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants or call 1800 680 244.



Appendix 4

FAQ

How do I identify fire ants?

Fire ants are aggressive and will swarm when disturbed, making them easy to spot. They are:

- are copper-brown with a darker abdomen
- vary in sizes (2–6 mm) within one nest.

Fire ant nests look like mounds or flat patches of loose soil with no clear entry or exit holes.

Fire ant nests may appear as:

- flattish patches of bare soil up to mounds of soil reaching 40cm high
- nests with no obvious entrance/exit holes
- loose or crumbly soil, honeycomb appearance inside
- aggressive ants swarming quickly and in high numbers when disturbed, stinging simultaneously

Schools are advised not to disturb suspected fire ants. Anyone in NSW who suspects fire ants must:

- **LEAVE IT:** Do not destroy or treat the nest. Fire ants are prohibited matter in NSW, and it is an offence to treat, move or possess them. Avoid disturbing fire ants to prevent injury and further spread.
- **SNAP IT:** Safely take a clear photo or video for identification.
- **CALL IT:** Call us immediately on the NSW Biosecurity Helpline 1800 680 244 or on the website www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fire-ants.

What are red imported fire ants and why are they dangerous?

Fire ants are a highly invasive species known for their painful stings, which can cause swelling, irritation, and, in rare cases, severe allergic reactions. They can also impact our agriculture, harm native wildlife and disrupt outdoor activities. Fire ants have the potential to cost Australia up to \$2.2b annually if they become established. That's why the NSW Government is acting quickly to control and eliminate them from NSW.

Is it safe for children to attend school during the treatment process?

Yes, it is safe for children to attend school. Treated nests will be clearly marked and access restricted. Treatments used are approved and safe when applied as directed. Ask all students to stay away from marked zones and staff to supervise to ensure everyone's safety.

What should I do if a child is stung by a fire ant?

If a child is stung, remove any remaining ants, wash the area with soap and water, apply a cold pack to reduce swelling, and monitor for any signs of an allergic reaction (such as difficulty breathing, swelling of the face or throat, or dizziness). If any severe symptoms occur, seek medical attention immediately.

How long will the treatment and assessment take?

The initial treatment and assessment will take place over several days. Follow-up monitoring and, if necessary, additional treatments may continue for up to two years as part of the nationally agreed eradication plan. The school will be kept informed throughout the process.

Will outdoor activities or playground access be affected?

Some outdoor areas may be temporarily closed or restricted to ensure safety during treatment and monitoring. The school will adjust activities as needed.

Are the chemicals used for treatment safe for children and pets?

Yes, the bait used is specifically approved for use in public spaces like schools and is safe when applied according to guidelines. Treated areas will be clearly marked, and children and pets should avoid these zones until the all-clear is given.

How can the school keep parents informed?

The school is advised to provide regular updates via email, newsletters, and the school website.

What can I do at home to help prevent fire ants from spreading?

Check your yard for unusual ant nests or activity. If you suspect fire ants, do not disturb the nest—report it to the NSW Biosecurity Helpline on 1800 680 244. Avoid moving soil, mulch, or potted plants from the school or affected areas to your home.