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## KEEP WATCH FOR FIRE ANTS!

**A**FTER an outbreak of the Red Imported Fire Ants in Queensland, metropolitan and rural residents are urged to send to AGWEST any unusual, small, red ants. There have been no records of this exotic ant in WA so far, but it could hitch a lift on a vehicle - especially earthmoving equipment.

The Red Imported Fire Ant looks very similar to many other common ants and is 2-6 mm long and red to brown in colour. It is distinguished by large ant mounds, which are commonly 30-40 cm high but can be up to 60 cm high and one metre wide. Another unique feature of the ant is the way it stings, forming painful pustules (pimples) within 24 hours.

Apart from their threat to humans, infestations of these ants can deter livestock from feeding grounds and their mounds can interfere with machinery in crop and orchard areas. They also compete for resources with native fauna, and can displace them from their natural habitat. They are most likely to gain a hold in the tropics, but could survive in the south-west around fresh water lakes and streams.

As there are more than 2000 species of native ants in Australia, the presence of this pest can only be confirmed by microscopic examination of actual specimens. Collect about a dozen suspect ants by attaching them to clear sticky tape and then sticking that to a piece of paper with your contact details. Post it to: Red Imported Fire Ant Surveillance, AGWEST, Locked Bag No 4, Bentley Delivery Centre, WA 6983.