

Request for Cooperation from Business that Handle Imports Coming from Fire Ant Habitats

Fire ants were first observed in Japan in June of 2017. Since then, they have been discovered in 45 instances in 14 prefectures (as of the end of August 2018), raising concerns that they are entering and becoming established in Japan. Of the 45 instances, many for which the route of entry into Japan is known involved containers or cargo that originated in or transited through China. Additionally, the first case in which fire ants entered via cargo originating in an airport in the United States was confirmed in 2018.

To prevent the infestation of fire ants in Japan, we request your cooperation, to the extent that is possible and with consideration for safety, in executing the following measures concerning containers and cargo originating in or transiting through fire ant habitats (e.g., China, Taiwan, and the United States).

1. When loading or shipping cargo

● Inspection when receiving empty containers

When receiving an empty container, inspect the container's interior.

It is assumed that fire ants enter containers while the containers are placed on the ground outdoors. Additionally, it is known that fire ants can build nests inside rotted flooring. Therefore, whenever you receive an empty container, please inspect its interior to ascertain the existence of rotting floorboards, the container's state of cleanliness, and the container's state of repair.

● Inspection prior to container loading

Before loading a container with cargo, confirm that there are no ants that may be fire ants present.

First, visually inspect the empty container's exterior and interior (checking the top, sides, and floor).

When inspecting the interior, pay particular attention to the corners and places where the sides and floor join.

When a colony of fire ants is present in a container, causing the container to vibrate by, for example, lightly striking the corners with a wooden mallet or stomping on the floorboards can cause the ants to come out into the open and become visible. When working, take sufficient care to avoid being stung by fire ants by wearing long-sleeved garments and thick rubber gloves.

*If you discover ants that you suspect to be fire ants

Do not use a container in which you have found ants that you suspect to be fire ants. The ants must be fully exterminated before the container can be used.

- Inspection of cargo

When placing cargo in a container, confirm that there are no ants that may be fire ants present on the cargo before proceeding.

When cargo has been placed outside near a fire ant habitat, fully inspect it to be sure there are no ants on it. Do this not only for the cargo's surfaces but also for gaps within it.

Sometimes fire ants are found on packing materials. This makes it necessary to also pay attention to the cardboard boxes, wooden crates, and other materials into which the cargo is packed.

*Regarding the placement of toxic bait

We are currently making inquiries with relevant organizations concerning how exporting countries view the legality of using toxic bait in containers during transport. Because we have not yet confirmed whether the use of toxic baits is permissible, we ask that you refrain from using them for the time being.

2. Inspection in container yards, etc.

- Inspection of unloaded containers

Confirm that there are no ants that may be fire ants present on containers that were unloaded in a container yard.

Visually inspect containers to confirm (to the degree possible) that no ants are present on the exterior (top and sides).

3. Inspection at the time of container opening, etc.

- Container inspection at time of opening and removing cargo

When opening a container or removing cargo from a container, confirm that there are no ants that may be fire ants present.

Before opening a container, reconfirm that there are no ants present on the container's exterior (top and sides). Then, after opening the container, visually inspect its interior as best as you can to confirm that there are no ants present.

When removing cargo from a container, proceed with work while checking for ants on the cargo and container's interior (top, sides, and floor).

- Inspection after removing cargo from a container

Inspect removed cargo (including its packing) and emptied containers.

Visually inspect cargo that has been removed from containers as well as the cardboard boxes, wooden crates, and other materials into which it was packed for ants.

Also inspect emptied containers.

First, visually inspect the container's interior (checking the top, sides, and floor). Pay particular attention to the corners and places where the sides and floor join.

When a colony of fire ants is present in a container, causing the container to vibrate by, for example, lightly striking the corners with a wooden mallet or stomping on the floorboards can cause the ants to come out into the open and become visible. When working, take sufficient care to avoid being stung by fire ants by wearing long-sleeved garments and thick rubber gloves.

***If you discover ants that you suspect to be fire ants (when in Japan)**

If you discover ants that you suspect to be fire ants, first ascertain the situation while taking steps to avoid exciting them. This should include determining where the ants are in the container and how many ants are present.

If a colony consisting of many ants is present (or thought likely to be present), close the container's doors and leave the container undisturbed so that the ants do not escape. Then immediately contact the relevant organization (e.g., the harbor manager, local government, or MOE regional environmental office) and ask about how to handle the situation. If possible, prevent the fire ants' escape by, for example, sealing the container with highly adhesive cloth packing tape.

If only a small number of ants are present and there is no danger that they will escape, exterminate them on the spot with a commercially-available insecticide spray.

4. Regarding the handling of suspicious ants (when in Japan)

Identifying fire ants can only be done by an expert, and positively identifying

suspicious ants as fire ants takes a certain amount of time (normally a few days). If this will present a problem in terms of operations or the public's daily living, the person who found the ants should, if possible, exterminate them with a spray-type insecticide even before they are identified as fire ants by viewing them in the same light as ordinary hygiene pests (e.g., ordinary ants, cockroaches, ticks, etc.). At this time, carefully check that there are no other suspicious ants in the area and then exterminate the ants by following the insecticide's instructions and taking care to avoid being stung.

However, if there are many suspicious ants present, or if, even when the ants are few in number, exterminating them will present a danger to people or possibly lead to the ants' escape, please be assured that the Ministry of the Environment, local government, businesses, facility managers, and others will work together to resolve the situation. Therefore, contacting the relevant organization should be your first step.

5. About Japan's Invasive Alien Species Act

Fire ants are designated as "invasive alien species" under Japan's Invasive Alien Species Act (IAS Act). Importing invasive alien species into Japan, moving invasive alien species within Japan, and other such acts are prohibited. Consequently, if fire ants are discovered at a port of entry, transport destination, container yard, or other location, moving containers and cargo will not be permitted until it is confirmed that the ants have been completely exterminated. Such a situation carries considerable operational risk.

Please visit the Ministry of the Environment's website for more information on the IAS Act.

The Invasive Alien Species Act: <http://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/as.html>

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