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GOVERNOR



**Department
of Agriculture**
STATE OF HAWAII

NEWS RELEASE

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visit our website at: <http://www.hawaiiag.org/hdoa/>

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New Stinging Little Fire Ant Found on the Big Island and Kauai

A new little stinging ant has been detected on Hawaii and Kauai, and the State Department of Agriculture is advising all residents, nurseries, and landscapers, statewide, to be aware of this new pest.

The little fire ant, *Wasmannia auropunctata*, packs a powerful sting, which especially affects those who are allergic or sensitive. Its sting is believed to be one of the most painful, when compared to the other six small stinging ants that are already established in Hawaii.

In light of this, the Department will be stepping-up its inspection of plants moving between islands. New procedures are being developed requiring plants moving off-island to be tested with a bait attractant. If no little fire ants are found, the plants will be allowed to be transported to its final destination. Currently, plants are visually inspected.

"Although the extent of the infestation is not known at this time, the Department is taking the most prudent course of action to prevent the further spread of this stinging ant," said James J. Nakatani, Chairperson for the Department of Agriculture.

"To date the Department has identified five sites of infestations -- four on the island of Hawaii and one on Kauai. Most of these sites are nurseries and the dispersal of this ant to uninfested areas could be very likely. Until further information can be obtained to indicate how widespread this ant may be, we are asking for the cooperation from local nursery producers and landscapers."

The most recent detection occurred on October 6, this year, when the ant was found on a 20-acre estate in Kalihiwai, Kauai. Entomologists believe the ant was transported to Kauai, last month, on some palms from a Big Island nursery. Based on the information on hand, the Department believes the population of this ant on Kauai is at its infancy and the pest can be eradicated. Last Thursday, October 14, the Department's Noxious Weed Specialist and inspectors from the State Department of Health Vector Control Branch applied an insecticide called Amdro, which has been found effective in destroying the ant.

On the Big Island, the ant has been discovered at four locations, including a nursery in the Hawaiian Paradise Park in Puna, a nursery in Kapohou, a nursery in Panaewa, and a fruit tree orchard in Papaikou. Although the first detection of the little fire ant was reported to the Department in March, this year, the ant may have been on the Big Island for at least six years. The ant probably made its way to the Big Island on plant material from Florida, where the ant is established. The Department is continuing to follow-up on leads to determine when the ant got here and where infested plants may have been distributed during that period.

To gain a better assessment of the infestation, the Department is asking nursery and landscaping operations to conduct on-site surveys to determine whether the ant is present. For more details on conducting these simple

surveys, nurseries and landscapers are asked to contact their nearest Department of Agriculture Plant Pest Control Office. Residents who are also getting bitten by a slow moving little brown ant, about the size of a speck of pepper, should contact the Department:

Big Island (Hilo)	(808) 974-4140
Big Island (Kona)	(808) 323-4565
Kauai	(808) 274-3069
Maui, Molokai, Lanai	(808) 873-3555
Oahu	(808) 973-9522

This ant is common in Southern Florida and also occurs in West Africa, the Galapagos Islands, New Caledonia, and the Solomon Islands. It is Neotropical in origin and is known throughout northern South America, Central America, the West Indies, and warmer portions of Mexico. In certain regions, new colonies of this ant have resulted in the decimation of other terrestrial species including beneficial insects and beetles.

Attached is a "New Pest Advisory" that contains more information about this ant. This information sheet can also be downloaded from the Department's website at www.hawaiiag.org/hdoa/npa.htm

Photo opportunities, such as an on-site survey can be arranged, upon request.

Kauai media contact is Noxious Weed Specialist Guy Nagai at (808) 274-3069;

Big Island media contacts are Entomologist Pat Conant at (808) 974-4140 (Hilo) or Noxious Weed Specialist Kyle Onuma at (808)974-4143 (Hilo);

Maui media contacts are Entomologist Grant Uchida, Noxious Weed Specialist Ed Tamura, or Plant Quarantine Supervisor Dennis Tokuoka at (808)873-3555;

and Oahu media contacts are Plant Pest Control Branch Manager Larry Nakahara at (808) 973-9522 or Ant Specialist Neil Reimer at (808) 586-0894.

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