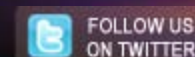


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VIDEO: Little Fire Ant Infestation Found in 12-14 Sites on Guam; No Funding To Eradicate Invasive Species

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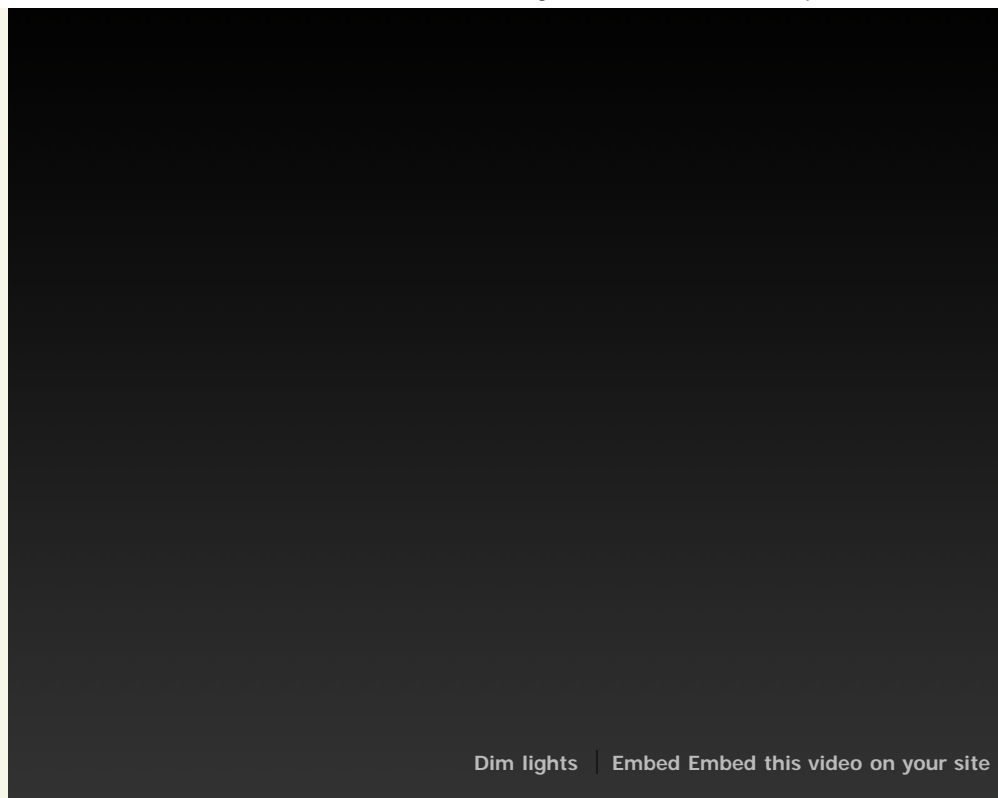
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Guam- The little fire ant continues to spread throughout the island, but no funding has been identified yet to eradicate this invasive species once and for all.

Back in November 2011, PNC reported on the South American little fire ant that was found in Primo's hardfill in Yigo by the Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle Eradication Team.

The most recent invasive species to hit the island is 1/16th of an inch or as long as a penny is thick. It doesn't build mounds, but nests under rocks, leaves, or pieces of bark. It also easily falls off trees and should not be confused with much larger ants. Originally from South America, the tiny predator has spread to places like Hawaii, Florida, New Caledonia, and the Galapagos.





Fast forward to today, the little fire ant has been identified in 12 to 14 different sites around Guam, including various spots in Yigo, Merizo, Umatac, Santa Rita, Nimitz Hill and Barrigada. The ant is believed to have come from Hawaii.

University of Guam Entomologist Dr. Ross Miller took us to the home of Barrigada resident John Concepcion, off Bello Road, to show us what a typical site looks like. Concepcion says he noticed the ants a couple of months ago.

"We noticed coming out of the jungle that the back of our neck is always itchy, like some parts of our arms, and we really don't know what's biting us," said Concepcion. "We can't tell. We can't see them."

It wasn't until Dr. Miller and his UOG team came to Concepcion's residence did they know what was the problem.

"They're looking around for the rhino beetles and they came across the fire ants," said Concepcion. "So that's when they educated us about rhino beetles and fire ants at the same time."

Aside from the rhino beetles also infesting their property, Concepcion mentions the fire ants have moved into his brother's home next door. He says his family is doing their best to deal with their unwanted house guests.

"I mean you can't help it," said Concepcion. "You come across it, they're going to bite you. They're going to sting you. Whatever they do. It's just so small. They're everywhere. It hurts. I just got bit a couple minutes ago and it's actually all irritated and I'm just scratching. And it's just one ant probably."

Dr. Miller says this little fire ant infestation is probably 3 to 4 years old. However, it can be eradicated in places like the



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Concepcion property, which is around an acre. The problem is that finding funds to do the eradication work has been a challenge.

"We've not been very successful, even though we've tried many, many sources of shaking funds loose to do the eradication," said Miller. "It's not cheap. To do really good job, probably quarter of a million dollars."

Comparing that to the millions of dollars of loss that the ant could cause to tourism and public health, Miller believes \$250,000 is a good investment. He warns if left uncontrolled, the fire ant can take over infested areas, cause pets and domesticated animals to go blind, and endanger agriculture, organic farming and the overall quality of life.

"That means a park like Ypao beach, for example, very popular park," said Miller. "If the little fire ant gets into there. It'll be up in the trees. If you sit underneath the trees, the ants are going to fall out when the wind blows, which is most of the time. They'll also be in the grass so that you really can't sit in the grass. You'll be stuck sitting in the cement pavilions with a spray can."

Dr. Miller says they are going to talk with the Guam Visitors Bureau for help. He doesn't think funding has been proposed in the any of the upcoming budgets for the next fiscal year. He also says the eradication team already had meetings with the governor and Lt. governor. While some money was freed up for the bio security division, he says it's not enough.

Dr. Miller mentions the devastation the fire ant has caused can be found in Hawaii on the Big Island, where eradication is no longer an option.

But how do you eradicate this invasive species? He says EPA approved pesticide disguised as bait. Miller describes it as a sticky goop that is sprayed on trees. He says the workers ants are attracted to the goop and then bring it back to the queens.

"So the workers then carry that food back to the queens," said Miller. "Over a little bit of time, the queens ingest enough that it kills them. You kill the queen, you kill the reproductive capacity of the colony and the ants are gone."

He explains this process can take at least 2 years, which is more of a reason eradication efforts need to happen as soon as possible.

"Guam has been through a lot," said Miller. "This is just another instance that anything that we do that changes the ecology of the island affects us all."

Miller warns people to also be mindful of transporting plants around the island because the fire ants may be tagging along.

For more information or if you find fire ants, call (671) 475-PEST .

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