

January, 2019 Newsletter

President`s Message



Fire Ants and Flooding Gulches

I am sorry to report that more fire ants have been found in Pa'auilo Mauka. There are now three properties on Ho'okahua Road and one on Waika'alulu Road on which they have been found. One of the properties on Ho'okahua is the same one that only last June had been determined to be free of fire ants. It was re-infested from a nearby property in a way that surprised me.

I knew that fire ants are mostly spread by people transporting them in potted plants or organic soil amendments. Sometimes they can be moved from place to place in other unlikely materials. I have heard of them being found in a load of asphalt shingles and loads of cinder.

What surprised me was that fire ants can also expand their range by being washed down a drainage area during heavy rains. Two of the three properties on Ho'okahua were colonized by fire ants which had been washed down a swale from the original, heavily infested property upstream of the other two. How the original property became infested remains a mystery, but since no other colonies have been found above it, the ants most likely were brought in on organic material. The fourth property on Waika'alulu Road was probably also infested by ants in transported material, but the owner is uncertain how it happened.

All four properties are being actively treated for fire ants, but the race is now on between the eradication efforts and the winter rains which can

raft new colonies down our ditches and swales. So, it is not enough to keep the ants off your own property; encourage your upstream neighbors to keep them off their properties as well.

Once again, please help stop the spread of these pernicious ants. Here's what you can do:

- Avoid importing any bulk organic matter onto your property if at all possible. If materials must be imported, surround the pile with an insecticide barrier treatment and regularly check for signs of ants (the peanut butter test). Please check out the Hawaii Ant Lab web site for more information, www.littlefireants.com.
- Landscape contractors often move equipment with residual organic materials from property to property. All vehicles and other machinery entering your property should be completely free of leaves, soil, chips or any other material that could contain ants. Please encourage any landscape contractors or hired maintenance workers to be vigilant about keeping vehicles and equipment completely free of organic debris. Ants can survive going through a wood chipper, so the entire feed path of the chipper should be thoroughly cleaned before it comes on to your property. Chip hauling trucks will need thorough cleaning as well.
- Check potted plants for ants before bringing them home and quarantine them on a pedestal in a shallow pool of water (like a wading pool or shallow water trough) mixed with a small quantity of dish detergent to keep the ants from walking across the water surface.
- If you live in the PMKCA area and become aware of an infestation, please contact any PMKCA board member (contact info at PMKCA.org) so that we can help you deal with it.

Even if you don't think you have ants, an occasional check for them around your property is still a good idea. The Ant Lab recommends quarterly inspections of high-risk areas and annual inspections of the entire property if possible. Waiting for them to announce their presence with painful stings may mean that they have expanded their range and control will be far more difficult.

Please don't assume that these ants can't be stopped and will spread everywhere. The main thing that helps them spread widely is unwitting human assistance with their transportation. Please take care to avoid giving them a free ride to your property. There is not much we can do about heavy rain, but a periodic check around drainages entering your property might detect any ants that have washed onto it from properties above you soon enough to allow early control.

Next PMKCA Meetings

The next quarterly meeting of the PMKCA board of directors is scheduled for 7 pm, Thursday, January 10th, 2019, at the Hawaiian Vanilla Company. At this meeting we'll firm up plans for our biannual general membership meeting to be held at the Pa'auilo School cafeteria on Tuesday, January 29th at 7 pm. The general meeting will include updates from invited elected officials and others on issues affecting our membership area and the larger Hāmakua coast. Also to be considered are some bylaws changes needed to reorganize our standing committees.

You don't need to be a board member or committee chairman to attend this next board meeting. It's open to all members and we welcome participation and contribution by everyone. Members of the public are also very welcome to attend our January 29th general meeting.