

## Trouble from fire ants goes well beyond their bite.



*Terry McIver*

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Editor-in-Chief

There is nothing good you can say about the fire ant. It's a tenacious, hungry, vicious little pest that's caused all kinds of control problems for our readers in warm climates.

I wasn't aware of the damage fire ants can cause until I started work on the news story found on page 12.

The fire ant has just about obliterated the quail and horned toad populations of Texas. The ants attack the eggs of these animals, and it's impossible for the parents to fight them off. Dottie

Woodson of the the Tarrant County Cooperative Extension, explains that the fire ants are so large in number and so menacing that they even attack and kill newborn calves.

During the great "storm surges" that hit Texas every so often after periods of dry weather, swarms of fire ants are seen floating down the Trinity River on leaves, logs and branches as the water carries them away.

But there are always more. Which brings us to

the related problem of diazinon contamination in the waste water of a couple dozen Texas cities.

Homeowners there are misapplying diazinon by the bagful. As we've heard before about homeowners everywhere, the ones in Texas also believe if one tablespoon is good, three tablespoons are better.

(Funny how they never use that reasoning with aspirin. If two are good, wouldn't four or five be better?)

Tarrant County recommends a two-step program of application which uses a combination of diazinon and baits, with the diazinon being applied according to label recommendations. But Woodson says it doesn't work well in urban areas. People just don't go along with the program.

The serious truth here is that the misapplication of diazinon has put cities in Texas and other states in non-compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Gardeners who prefer all-organic methods have called for a ban on diazinon, which, A) isn't within the state's power to do; B) would deprive responsible professionals of an effective, *well-tested and approved* product; and C) would give further credence to the misconception that "all pesticides are bad."

One solution to the Texas problem would be a new \$80 million treatment facility, which would of course require a tax hike.

Fortunately, the EPA has withheld \$25,000/day fines, thanks to city efforts to educate the public.

Those education programs are not new, however. Fort Worth has warned the public about product misuse before. It's just that as the city budget fluctuates, so does the regularity of the literature that is given to consumers.

Product stewardship is an "out of sight, out of mind" practice with people everywhere.

How ironic: some of the same people who sprinkle diazinon on their lawns like sugar on cereal may be the same ones who see red when a professional applicator shows up next door.

As a professional applicator, strive to make your company's customer education campaigns consistent. Send your clients—and even people who aren't your clients—regular reminders on proper product application.

This problem, as serious as it is, certainly provides you with a sales approach.

As funny as it sounds, the line, "Don't try this at home. I'm a trained professional," is where it's at. Encourage homeowners to leave anything that has to do with chemicals to you, the trained professional! **LM**

*Correction: The address for the Sports Turf Manager's Association was listed incorrectly on page 8 of our December Green Book. Correct address for STMA is: 1375 Rolling Hills Loop, Council Bluffs, IA 51503-8552*