

Fire ants reappearing in Orange County

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Fire ants are reappearing in California's Orange County the result, say some critics, of the state ending its fire ant eradication funding in 2003.

"There's no question that the end of the (state) eradication program led to the stopping of treatments," Les Greenberg, a University of California-Riverside entomology specialist told the Orange County Register. "In a couple of years the ants had time to spread again -- mostly by their own means, by flight, as well as being transported by people."

State officials disagree, noting California still spends \$1 million a year on a fire-ant program, mainly to help quarantined nurseries prevent the spread of the ants.

The biting, stinging ants -- native to South America -- were discovered in 1998, after they had already colonized most of southern Orange County, the newspaper reported. Although they don't carry diseases that can infect humans, they tend to build large, unsightly mounds and attack in large masses, each ant delivering multiple stings.

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