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It is spring time here in south Alabama, and with the increasing temperatures comes an increasing likelihood you and your family will be spending time outside. If you have a pond or lake around, you will likely be fishing or swimming more these days and throughout the summer. One thing to be wary of when venturing to your pond's edge is the presence of fire ants. They to, are growing active this time of year.

Every spring, fire ants swarm. You can see them flying around ponds with their large white wings. Many times, they will land on the water and be eaten by the bream in your pond. One or two of these ants will not cause much damage to the fish; however, problems do arise when fish gorge on large numbers of these insects. The fish don't seem to be able to pass up a free meal. Unfortunately, just as a fire ant hurts you when you step in a mound, large quantities can kill fish when eaten.

It is not uncommon in the springtime to see fish kills resulting from this feeding activity. If you experience a fish kill, and suspect those swarming fire ants are to blame, you can cut open a newly dead or dying fish and examine the stomach contents. If it is packed with ants, you can be sure that the fish are dying from overindulgence on these insects.

It is important to identify the cause of any fish kill, and this one is easy to diagnose.

However, if you experience a fish kill, and the ant is not to blame, call your local extension office for advice on possible causes, and solutions to prevent future losses.

For additional questions or information, contact P.J. Waters, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, 438-5690.