

Montana small grain insects

Wireworms

(Coleoptera: Elateridae)

Wireworms cause extensive damage to small grain in Montana. Infestations are commonly misdiagnosed as "winter kill".

Capsule Information Series

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Wireworms



Click beetle



Wireworm



Dead seedling

Adults are "click beetles". They lay eggs in the soil. Adult beetles do not damage plants. Several species are common, and are of various sizes and colors.

Wireworms, or larvae, hatch from eggs. They live for 2-9 years in the soil. They are attracted to carbon dioxide which is released by germinating seeds and growing plants. They feed on seeds, roots, and underground stems. Damaged plants are susceptible to plant pathogens. Surviving plants may have tiny holes in the leaves.

Some Concepts:

- Infestations may cause skips in rows, or circular damaged areas in fields.
- Losses may be reduced by treating seed with lindane.
- Deeply planted seed is more likely to be damaged, for seed treatment effects remain near the seed.
- Damage may occur in winter wheat in the fall, or early in the season in winter or spring grain.
- Wireworms may move deeper underground when soil temperatures rise or when soil moisture declines in the spring.
- Seed treatment may reduce populations by 70%.
- False wireworm larvae are larger, feed more rapidly, and also cause extensive damage.
- False wireworm adults are large black beetles which are commonly seen moving rapidly on the ground in the summer.
- Seed treatment is the only method for preventing losses from wireworms.