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Shoe-bomb scan

WA technology leads fight against terrorism

By CORTLAN BENNETT

PERTH-BASED QR Sciences has sold its latest bomb-detection technology to a subsidiary of US giant General Electric.

The deal means millions of US aircraft passengers will soon be able to keep their shoes on as they pass through airport security, saving time and money — and embarrassment in many cases.

GE Security will use QR Science's quadruple resonance, or QR, technology to produce thousands of radio-wave "shoe scanners".

The scanners, which are being trialled in the US, will be used at airport checkpoints to determine if passengers are carrying explosives in their footwear. No longer will they have to remove their shoes for inspection.

Removing shoes has been one of the biggest inconveniences for international travellers and airline and security staff since the September 11, 2001, attacks in the US. But it is also a costly exercise, with delayed flights and extra security arrangements eating into airlines' bottom lines.

QR Sciences commercial systems vice-president Gary Pennefather said the technology would save time and money.

"At most US airports, you pretty well have to remove your shoes," Mr Pennefather said.

"Apart from the security issue, the business impact on the airport is pretty severe — it slows everything down.

"GE has put our technology into a little platform that you stand on. It scans your shoes and hence you can leave them on.

"It helps security and helps passengers get in and out of the airport faster.

"There are roughly 2000-odd checkpoints in major US airports and we imagine that (GE) would try to put a machine in every one of those checkpoints.

"That's what they're pushing to the US Government and airports (at the moment)."

Mr Pennefather said the QR technology used harmless radio waves to detect explosives.

"If there are explosives present, they will excite a response from the explosive and the explosive will then emit another radio frequency we can detect," he said.

"The radio frequency is the same as an AM radio, so it is completely safe.

"It takes a couple of seconds — about the same time as walking through a metal detector."

Unlike traditional swabbing methods used to detect traces of explosives on the outside of luggage, clothes and shoes, the radio-wave technology could "see

inside" those items, Mr Pennefather said.

QR Sciences chief executive Kevin Russeth said he expected the ASX-listed firm to soon be earning royalties from GE Security.

"In the near term, we expect to earn royalties from GE shoe-scanner products, which we expect GE to begin selling shortly, with longer-term possibilities for income from related GE products in baggage, personnel, mail and cargo screening," Mr Russeth said.



FOOTNOTE: Tighter security