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## Aussie invention puts a stop to airport shoe shuffle

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THE annoyance of having to remove shoes during airport security checks is to become a thing of the past thanks to technology developed in Australia.

Perth company QR Sciences has signed an agreement with US industrial giant General Electric to supply technology for a machine capable of scanning shoes.

Travellers stand on a platform and GE's ShoeScanner uses the technology, which is similar to a medical MRI, to detect explosives within five to eight seconds.

QR Sciences, which receives a royalty every time the technology is used, stands to reap millions from its use.

The technology uses radio waves to penetrate objects and excite a response from the atoms in substances such as plastic explosives. It is more sensitive and versatile than traditional detection techniques.

"It's low-frequency radio

waves, AM radio basically, so it's very safe," said QR Sciences vice-president of commercial applications Gary Pennefather.

"You come up and you stand on a little platform ... for a couple of seconds and then you keep walking through.

"And while you're standing on it, it's putting radio waves through the soles of your shoes and listening for the response."

The US Transportation Security Administration is assessing the machine as a way of cutting queues at 2000 US airport checkpoints. The first ones could be installed by the end of the year.

People fumbling with footwear at checkpoints creates a logjam in the US, where passengers have been regularly required to remove shoes since the 2001 terrorist attacks. Security agencies increased the scrutiny of shoes after terrorist Richard Reid that year tried to blow up a Paris-to-Miami flight using explosive hid-

den in his sneakers.

Initial plans are to use the ShoeScanner for the US Registered Traveller program due to get under way this month.

Under that program, travellers who pass a background check and pay an annual fee will be able to get through security faster.

But Mr Pennefather said the TSA had indicated it was interested in a wider rollout of the device and it could also be introduced in Australia.

"ShoeScanner, although it improves security, also provides a business return because people get through the airport a lot faster," he said. "They end up in the transit lounge shopping for a bit longer, they're less irritated — all those good things."

The Australian Customs Services is already trialling QR Sciences technology to help it better detect weapons in the postal system.