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## Locus Technologies turns to the Internet

Walnut Creek-based engineering firm wants to revolutionize remediation at Superfund sites

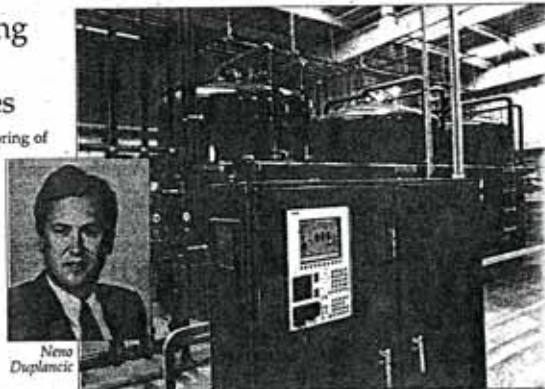
BY JEFF QUACKENBUSH  
STAFF REPORTER

WALNUT CREEK - Locus Technologies, considered one of the top environmental engineering companies in Silicon Valley, wants to revolutionize remediation at Superfund and other contaminated sites by employing the Internet.

The Walnut Creek-based company has developed an Internet solution called LocusFocus that

allows for remote monitoring of water levels, flow rates, pressures, and other operational statistics of treatment plants; opening and closing of valves; and checking for problems, all from a Java-equipped Internet browser on a computer.

Setting up LocusFocus involves more (please turn to page 8)



Neno Duplancic

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than just installing software. It requires on-site installation of special automated valves and sensors to transmit data from the site to the client's desktop via the Internet. Depending on site location, the Internet link is made via phone, DSL, or T-1 line; cable modem; or satellite system. For a small site with a couple of valves and a treatment system, installation of a LocusFocus automated system could cost just \$30,000.

#### Big savings

Locus Technologies president and CEO Neno Duplancic says the use of LocusFocus can mean cost savings of 30%-70% over the traditional monitoring method of periodically sending technicians to each site.

"The bottom line is you go only when you need to go," he says.

He cites as an example an automated system Locus installed last summer for Union Pacific Railroad at a site on Donner Pass in the Sierra Nevada. Union Pacific's former engineering firm had to send technicians from Sacramento to monitor the site.

"Sometimes it was under snow and inaccessible, so they'd have to dig tunnels," he says.

Union Pacific recovered the cost of the new system in less than six months, while many clients do so with LocusFocus automation retrofits in just two or three months, according to Mr. Duplancic.

Another cost-saving comes from getting the most mileage out of water filters in the treatment system. LocusFocus monitors the condition of the filters and sends an e-mail or page when they are nearly spent, eliminating the practice of replacing them, regardless of condition, on periodic visits because of the length of time between visits. E-mail and pages are also used for alerts

on abnormal readings.

#### Concerns, barriers, and solutions

While remote monitoring and control via the Internet is new, such technology is already in use in the form of telemetry systems that allow dialing into a dedicated phone line for real-time data and control, according to Michael Gill, Superfund technical liaison in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 9, which covers California, Nevada, Hawaii, and Arizona.

Mr. Gill says two concerns are security from Internet hackers and monitoring of spills with any remote system.

Regarding the first, Mr. Duplancic says access to the LocusFocus system is password-protected on a secure server. Regarding the second, he says one of the safeguards of the system is the cross-checking of one sensor reading with another. In other words, a valve functioning or a spill could be confirmed based on water pressure, flow, level, and other readings on either side of a component. Another safeguard is an on-site camera that can feed pictures via the Internet.

One of the barriers to complete automation is water testing, because systems that can feed water-test information in real time are too expensive at present to be practical. However, Mr. Duplancic predicts that in a year or so, such technology will be affordable, putting the final link in the automation chain.

#### The fastest growing part

Headquartered at 1333 North California Boulevard in Walnut Creek, Locus Technologies has offices in Mountain View and Los Angeles.

The company, which handles jobs from the 480-acre Middlefield-Ellis-Whisman Superfund Site in Mountain View to contaminated sites in Ohio, New York, Puerto Rico, France, and Singapore, is the three-year-old descendent of the former Canonic Environmental Services. Mr. Duplancic, formerly vice-president of the western region of Canonic, formed Locus and bought the assets of Canonic's regional office. Locus took in \$7 million in revenue the first year and \$9 million the second as its client list diversified.

Since Locus launched LocusFocus in early 1999, then under a different name, existing Locus clients Schlumberger, Raytheon, Intel, FMC, and Union Pacific have become heavy users of the service. LocusFocus business now accounts for 15%-20% of Locus' business, which was about \$10 million revenues last year. Mr. Duplancic says that part of the business is growing significantly faster than the rest of the company.

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