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News Release

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U.T. Dallas Given OK to Pilot Test Web-Based Hazardous Materials Emergency Response System

EPA, TNRCC Speed up Testing of 'E-Plan' Due to Possible Terrorist Threats

RICHARDSON, Texas (Dec. 10, 2001) - State and federal regulators have given The University of Texas at Dallas approval to proceed with pilot testing of an Internet-based electronic information system designed to support emergency response personnel in the event of a release of hazardous materials. Testing of the emergency response system -- called "E-Plan" - has been accelerated, due in part to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, university officials said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) have instructed U.T. Dallas researchers to begin limited testing of the system, developed by the university over the past 13 months in a "proof of concept" study funded by a \$382,000 grant. The two agencies have provided an additional \$918,000 for the pilot test, bringing the total funding for the project to approximately \$1.3 million.

The E-Plan system collects and stores critical information about hazardous materials for immediate access by rapid response teams in the

event of a crisis. Such information will include locations of facilities where hazardous materials are stored; the name, quantity and properties of chemicals stored in each facility; and contact information for emergency personnel at each site. Using the system, emergency workers also can link to other critical information, including site maps and building plans where chemicals are stored, and profiles of nearby population centers and environmentally sensitive areas that could be at risk in the event of an incident. Also available will be first aid directions and methods for the clean up and safe disposal of hazardous materials.

“Currently, this information is provided by companies to various government agencies in paper form,” said Dr. E. Douglas Harris, associate dean of the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science at UTD. “E-Plan will centralize and integrate this vital data electronically, so that information can be obtained virtually instantly via computer by personnel responding to an emergency, thus saving a significant amount of time and, quite likely, lives and property.”

“The E-Plan will provide immediate access for first responders to incidents involving hazardous materials that may endanger the public health and safety,” said Jim Staves, team leader for emergency prevention and preparedness, EPA Region 6. “Utilization of this information will increase the protection of the public as well as those who respond to the incidents.”

Due to the proprietary nature of the information to be contained in E-Plan, elaborate security provisions have been incorporated into its design, Harris said.

“We have developed a fault-tolerant, disaster-tolerant system, with multiple redundancies and the most advanced security features to ensure that the information is available when needed and accessible only by authorized personnel,” he said.

The pilot test of E-Plan will take place in the EPA’s five-state Region 6, which includes Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas and New Mexico - an area that contains the bulk of the nation’s hazardous materials, according to Harris

Specific test sites, which were not identified, were selected because of their heavy concentrations of facilities that produce, store and utilize hazardous materials, including many petrochemical refineries and storage facilities, Harris said.

The test, which had been scheduled to last two years, has been shortened to 15 to 18 months.

The hazardous materials emergency response system has been developed by a team from UTD headed by Harris, the project’s principal investigator. Other team members from UTD include Dr. Balaji Raghavachari, Dr. Gopal Gupta and Dr. Doug Benn, as well as several graduate students.

UTD has the fastest growing school of engineering and computer science in the United States. Last year, the Jonsson School conferred 475 computer science degrees, one of the largest such totals of any college or university in the nation.

About UTD

The University of Texas at Dallas, located at the convergence of Richardson, Plano and Dallas in the heart of the complex of major multinational technology corporations known as the Telecom Corridor, enrolls more than 7,000 undergraduate and 5,000 graduate students. The school’s freshman class traditionally stands at the forefront of Texas state universities in terms of average SAT scores. The

university offers a broad assortment of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs. For additional information about UTD, please visit the university's web site at www.utdallas.edu.

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