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### **S.F. Startup Protects From Airborne Attack**

**By: Benny Evangelista**

A San Francisco startup endorsed by former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge has begun marketing a system designed to protect a building's ventilation system in the case of an airborne chemical, radiological or biological attack.

Building Protection Systems Inc. developed technology that can automatically shut down an air intake system three seconds after detecting a toxic substance. The system also is designed to give building managers and emergency workers detailed information about the substance.

Ridge, who recently signed on as a senior adviser to the firm, said in a telephone interview that the system would help plug a major vulnerability for office buildings and could be used for other public areas such as transportation systems.

"What was the most impressive thing about this operation was they weren't prepared to go to market until they were professionally satisfied that it was a fail-safe system," Ridge said. "All you need are one or two false positives and you can forget about marketing their product. They did it right rather than doing it quick."

President Greg Eiler said the firm installed one of its Building Sentry One systems in one of Prudential Financial's headquarter buildings in New Jersey last year and another in March. Eiler said his firm decided to market the system "now that we're confident that the technology works."

Security experts have said the United States is vulnerable to attacks by terrorists using toxic chemicals or radiation. Building Protection has patented a system that uses sensors installed in a building's air intake vents, which sometimes are at street level. The system has received a Qualified Anti-Terrorist Technology designation from the Homeland Security Department.

Two types of sensors, one attuned to detect 38 readily available toxic chemicals such as chlorine and cyanide, and the other to detect 120 types of radioactive isotopes, are placed in a building's intake vents.

If the sensors detect potentially harmful amounts of a toxic substance, whether released on purpose or by accident, it signals the building's air circulation system to shut down fans and blowers to prevent the toxins from spreading inside.

The sensors send continuous readouts to building managers and to a central Building Protections monitoring station in New York. The system can be programmed to call police and fire agencies and tell emergency personnel responding to the scene what the substance is and whether building occupants need to be evacuated or stay inside.

The company has installed the system in other buildings, but declined to name them because of security reasons. Large buildings can have as many as 32 sensors and the cost is about 50 cents per square foot, said Mike Welden, vice president of business development.



He said the firm also is developing a portable system for a West Coast police agency that could be used at major events. Another system is being developed for public transit.

Ridge, who became President Bush's first Homeland Security secretary in the wake of the 2001 terror attacks, became a senior adviser to Building Protection Systems on May 1.

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