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Sensitive sniffer detects concealed contraband, 1

Agreement on beef exports, 2

Nuclear co-operation agreement with Turkey, 2

Innovative furniture: NY fair indicates increased interest, 3

External relations minister visits Central America, 4

Embassy closes in Beirut, 5

International trade talks set for Canada, 5

Increase in March 1985 retail trade over the 1984 figure, 5

From sea to sea: one-legged runner aids cancer research, 6

Student business centres, 6

Distinguished entrepreneur, 6

News of the arts — awards, exhibition, competition, 7

News briefs, 8

Second straight Stanley Cup for Oilers, 8

Sensitive sniffer detects concealed contraband

Sciex of Thornhill, Ontario, a world leading company in vapour sensing technology, is developing an electronic-nosed "super-sniffer" called the AROMIC Cargo Examination System, to detect contraband material sealed in legitimate land, sea and air freight cargo containers.

To illustrate the device's sensitivity, Sciex's vice-president of marketing, Neil Reid, said it could detect one drop of alcohol allowed to diffuse throughout the Astrodome in Houston, Texas, if the stadium were completely sealed. But the AROMIC, can also be used to detect other contraband including weapons, explosives and drugs.

The growth of sealed containers used to transport goods has made detection of contraband extremely difficult said Jim Reynolds, vice-president and general manager of Sciex.

In most countries, cargo is examined manually, by X-rays or with dogs trained to sniff out drugs and other contraband. Manual inspection involves time for unpacking and repacking containers and produces the problem of damaging goods, as well as delay to cargoes.

With the computerized AROMIC, two people can examine between 20 to 40 standard cargo containers an hour, without opening them.

Government backing

To assist in developing the AROMIC, the company has received a \$3.1-million federal grant from the Defence Industry Productivity Program. The grant will supplement the cost

of developing the sniffer, which Mr. Reynolds expects to reach \$9.1 million and take between four and five years to complete.

Under the federal agreement the government will receive 3 per cent of revenues from units sold between November 1, 1989 and October 31, 1994.

Mr. Reynolds said sales are expected to total \$150 million over the next nine years. Each unit costs between \$1 million and \$3 million.

Spectrometer based products

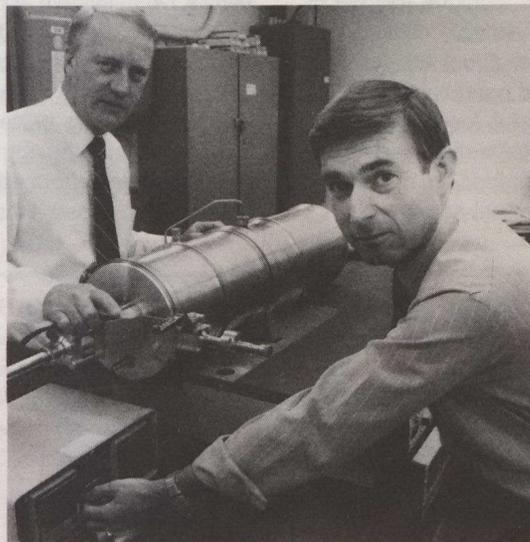
Sciex, a division of MDS Health Group Limited, a Canadian company, was formed

in 1970 and is involved in the design, development, manufacture and marketing of mass spectrometer-based products for trace organic and inorganic analysis. The company's product line includes three types of systems, the TAGA, the ELAN and the AROMIC.

The TAGA, first introduced by the company in 1975, is a highly

sensitive, accurate mass spectrometer which operates under direct computer control. It is capable of instantaneously detecting and identifying a broad range of chemical compounds at trace levels in gases, solids and liquids.

This TAGA system has been used to analyze common environmental pollutants such as tetrachlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins (TCDD), fragrances and flavours, carcinogens in foods and beverages and materials characterization, as well as trace detection and identification for lethal vapours of military significance. It is



General Manager James Reynolds (left) and vice-president Neil Reid check a Sciex "supersniffer".

Tibor Kolley, Globe and Mail



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