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Diverse risk tools on display

by [JOANNE WOJCIK](#)

• **Published on April 29, 2002**

NEW ORLEANS-Like the diverse ingredients of New Orleans' renowned Creole cuisine, exhibitors at the 40th Risk & Insurance Management Society Inc. Annual Conference and Exhibition made up a virtual gumbo of risk management products and services.

Whether it was to promote environmental risk consulting, terrorism risk modeling or a more humane way to protect delivery workers against animal attacks, vendors cooked up various creative recipes to entice visitors into their booths.

San Francisco-based USI Insurance Services Inc., whose booth in the exhibit hall offered risk managers the opportunity to be photographed in an open-cockpit race car, came to RIMS in New Orleans in part to show how the broker has changed since last year.

"We've expanded significantly, and we have added several different features to the organization in terms of services and risk techniques that we didn't have in the past," explained Greg Roberts, national managing director for USI's environmental risk mitigation group in Houston.

For example, "six months ago we embarked upon an environmental practice group, which is done a little differently than the rest of the brokers in that we actually are hired by other brokers to do some of their consulting work," he said.

USI also has partnered with Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos and the Environmental Risk Management Institute, a consulting group affiliated with the university, to develop environmental risk profiles for corporations, "so they understand better what their environmental risks are," Mr. Roberts said.

The consulting work runs from environmental pollution to bioterrorism and "good old mold," he said.

"Mold is a big issue right now, and there's a lot of research that we've done on the scientific and medical side and with

ways to manage and mitigate the potential for environmental liabilities," Mr. Roberts said.

Though a first-time exhibitor at this year's RIMS conference, Houston-based ABS Consulting is not new to the field of risk management, according to Alle L'eveille, manager of marketing communications.

The firm, which once focused largely on identifying and mitigating offshore risks, acquired Oakland, Calif.-based earthquake engineering firm EQE International Inc. in July 2001 to expand its geographical reach its services in the area of structural engineering and risk management, she said.

And, since Sept. 11, ABS Consulting also has been helping companies and organizations that are seeking to reduce their exposure to certain terrorism risks. MIDAS-AT, an ABS Consulting division in Bethesda, Md., is working with organizations to model the effects of nuclear and biochemical releases, Ms. L'eveille said.

"So whether it's intentional, like anthrax in a building, or if it were a nuclear release, they can model either inside a building in the way the air flows, or they can model in a city the way the air flows, or they can model around a nuclear plant," she explained.

The company also can use its EQECAT modeling capabilities to measure workers compensation-related catastrophe exposures for companies and organizations that have a large concentration of workers in a single location, Ms. L'eveille said.

"For us, (terrorism risks are) not anything new. Our skill set is the same; we're just looking at a different set of vulnerabilities," Ms. L'eveille said.

As ABS Consulting promoted its high-tech risk identification capabilities, nearby first-time exhibitor Cotton Cat National Disaster Recovery Services was touting its disaster recovery capabilities. The Houston-based firm assisted numerous businesses that had been located in the World Trade Center, according to Randall Thompson, senior vp.

"We'll get businesses back in order, back operational as quickly as we can. Whether it's the structure, whether it's the contents, we have a complete catastrophe management program," he said. The firm also provides electronic data and document recovery services and assists with contingency planning, said Mr. Thompson.

First-time exhibitor Aquila Energy, a subsidiary of Aquila Inc. of Kansas City, Mo., offered information to risk managers about its weather risk transfer products.

Although the company primarily is an energy provider, it has "branched into insurance, like energy products, where you've

got actuarial techniques merging with the energy and commodity piece," said Brian O'Hearne, president of Hamilton, Bermuda-based Aquila Energy.

The company has provided coverage for some unusual risks, according to Todd Alexander, manager of product development.

Aquila has developed a Japanese weather-linked contract related to eel consumption, Mr. O'Hearne said. "When it gets hot, they eat more eel in the summer," he said. Because eel is purchased in advance, Aquila provides coverage "based on how hot it is in August during this prime eel-eating season," he explained.

"Japanese industries have been very exciting," Mr. Alexander said. "They keep very careful statistics on their businesses, which allows for really strong correlations to be made with weather. There are beer-drinking day contracts-temperature plays a big role in the amount of beer that's sold."

The television and film industry also has been showing a lot of interest because the cost of weather-related production delays can be significant, Mr. Alexander said.

The St. Paul Cos. Inc.'s booth at this year's RIMS conference featured a riverboat casino-decked out in patriotic red, white and blue-and gave risk managers a chance to try their luck on a video card game.

"The whole idea is to draw people into the booth, and this is a big draw. And that gives our salespeople the opportunity to talk to them while they're standing in line," explained Leslie Merritt, exhibit manager for the insurer in St. Paul, Minn.

The card game, dubbed "the St. Paul Shuffle," offered several prizes, including a red, white and blue tote bag and similarly decorated beach blanket.

Although John Connell, president of Richmond, Va.-based Premier Pet Products Inc., didn't bring along a dog to demonstrate his animal deterrent spray, he did present a video illustrating its effectiveness in preventing dog bites.

Mr. Connell noted that such injuries are sustained by approximately 1.5 million people in the United States each year. More than 500,000 of these bite sufferers require medical attention, and about 20 people die each year from their injuries.

The product, which is made from fragrant citronella grass, helps companies that employ home delivery workers avoid exposure to pet-owner liability lawsuits stemming from the use of pepper spray, Mr. Connell said. Such sprays can be harmful to eyes and mucous membranes and often make animals more aggressive.

The citronella-based deterrent spray also can help reduce workers compensation claims filed by employees who are injured when the wind causes pepper spray to blow back in their direction, he said.



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