

Entrepreneurs want to put urban data on the Net

NETWORK | With GeoWeb, disaster relief workers could see the location of electricity lines or water pipes

BY PETER WILSON
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Exchanging geographic information on the Internet can be as simple as sending an out-of-town pal a Google Map of the route to your house from the airport.

Or it can be as complex as trying to coordinate and keep up to date information on water lines, property boundaries, the locations of mosques and where electrical power runs in a rapidly growing city like Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

That being the case, wouldn't it be great to have a way to keep all that information flowing freely (although not necessarily for free) over the Web and as fresh as yesterday's land survey?

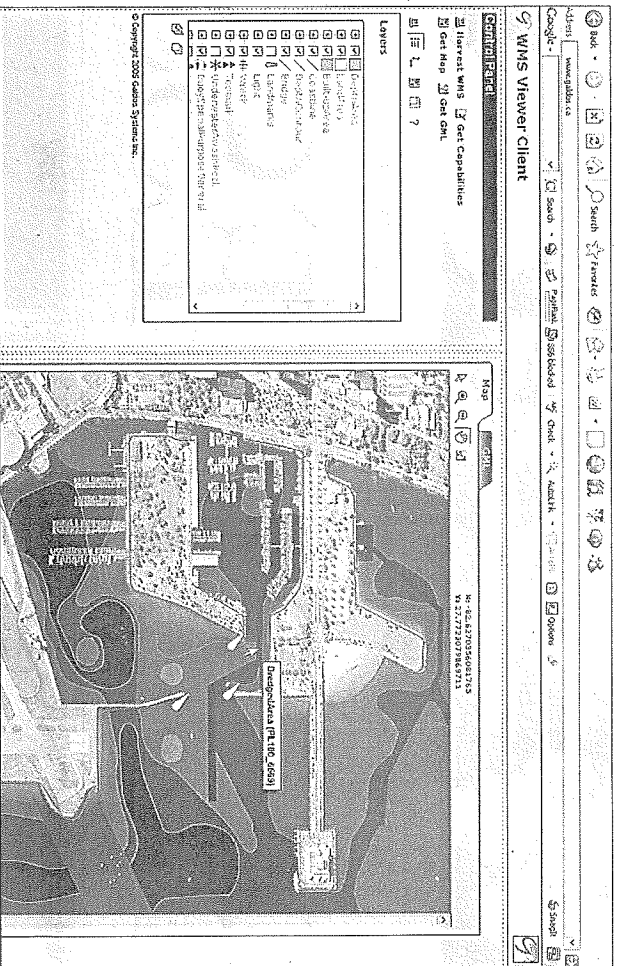
Well, yes, says Vancouver's Ron Lake, a driving force behind a concept called GeoWeb, that will occupy the minds of top geography technologists at a five-day conference being held here this week.

Microsoft, Google and Oracle are among the sponsors of the event at Simon Fraser University's Morris J. Wosk Centre.

"The technologies and the marketplace have begun to mature to the point that the GeoWeb is becoming increasingly a real idea and something that can, in fact, be built," said Lake, CEO of Galdos Systems Inc., the initial developer of the Net geographic technology called GML (geography markup language).

Lake, whose company is holding the event along with the Geospatial Information & Technology Association, said the GeoWeb will not have a central home page or be a separate network, except perhaps in part, and will be available over the Internet.

Such a network will do everything from allowing homeowners to quickly get a look at their properties online (already available in a number of Lower



Detailed maps for major projects can be obtained from sites such as Galdos Systems Inc.'s Galdos Web Map Service. The company is a driving force behind the GeoWeb concept.

Mainland municipalities) to providing disaster relief workers with rapid, accurate information.

"Let's suppose there's a hurricane or an earthquake, then the municipal or county or provin-

Lake's own company has a contract with Riyadh to develop a local piece of what would ultimately be on the GeoWeb.

"It initially involves five agencies in the city," said Lake.

These agencies track such things as property boundaries, road centre lines, major buildings, water and sewage lines, electrical lines and telephone lines.

"What we'll be doing is providing software that links the databases that each agency has. As people make updates in their own area and their own jurisdiction, the other people in that group of agencies will subscribe to those.

"In another area the information gathered might relate to resource exploration."

Another evolution would be for something like real-time traffic flows to be tracked.

Among the items being discussed at the conference include how payments will be made for these data and how they will be kept secure.

Lake said that he doesn't expect GeoWeb to evolve as a homogenous entity, springing up everywhere all at once.

"It will grow in little pockets around the world," he said.