

Passive RFID Tags OK'd for Takeoff

The U.S. government has cleared the use of passive RFID tags on airplanes, although a formal report has yet to be published.

By Jonathan Collins

Apr. 13, 2005—Speaking at the RFID Journal LIVE! conference this week in Chicago, John Dimtroff, an aerospace electronics engineer for the Federal Aviation Administration, told conference attendees that the FAA has decided to allow passive tags to be used on airplanes and that the written policy would be published this month.

Boeing and Airbus—the world's biggest aircraft manufacturers—have both been working with aviation authorities to allow passive RFID tags for use on planes. Both company want to use RFID to track and maintain aircraft parts in their supply chain and in operating aircraft. Boeing and Airbus representatives who attended the conference welcomed the FAA's decision.

"Passive RFID can now be used; 2.45 MHz, 915 MHz and 13.56 MHz passive RFID can all be used as long as they are only interrogated when the plane is not in the air," said Kenneth Porad, Boeing's principal engineer for reliability and maintainability.

Airbus expects the FAA decision to be followed by similar action in Europe, according to Jens Heitmann, the company's senior manager of system/equipment standardization process and methods.

The FAA's decision is likely to have a significant impact on the aviation industry, according to Erik Michielsen, director of RFID and ubiquitous networks at [ABI Research](#) and author of a recent ABI report entitled *RFID Aerospace and Defense Market*.

"The FAA passive RFID approval is critical to the industry's future. With the FAA backing, Airbus, Boeing and the numerous other implicated parties can now more formally address RFID collaboration in an industry desperately in need of more-efficient inventory and supply chain management solutions," he says.

Prior to the FAA decision, Boeing and Airbus executed studies to determine if on-board RFID tags would interfere with an aircraft's critical systems. As part of that work, Boeing carried out two FAA-approved trials, one involving 13.56 MHz tags and the other using 915 MHz tags, on a working aircraft. (See [UHF Tags to be Tested on Planes](#) and [Tests Show UHF Tags Safe for Planes](#).)

In July, Boeing will start trials with Delta Air Lines to test UHF RFID tags on 14 Pratt & Whitney 2037 jet engines on Delta-owned Boeing 757 aircraft (see [Delta to Test Tags on Aircraft Engines](#)). The tests were initially set to take place last year but suffered delays.

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