Tag Data Standard Supports DOD Codes

A revision to EPCglobal's tag data standard includes the Department of Defense's legacy product code formats.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

July 21, 2005—EPCglobal's electronic product code (EPC) tag data standard has been revised to incorporate the Defense Department's Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) code and the Department of Defense Activity Address Code (DODAAC), which are used by DOD suppliers to identify shipments. The department's 60,000 suppliers can use either these DOD tag data constructs or the EPC tag data construct to comply with the agency's request to apply RFID tags on all shipments to the military by January 2007.

Prior to the new standard, an RFID reader, or interrogator, could read CAGE, DODACC and EPC, but only after the software for CAGE / DODACC and then a second software to support EPC was loaded onto it. The revised tag data standard, however, simplifies that process. Once a reader is loaded with software based on the revised EPC tag data standard, it will be able to read all three types of codes, without the need to install other software.

"Now that it's on the tag data standard, the reader manufacturers will start using it, and end users can get an upgrade for their current readers so that they'll read tags encoded with CAGE and DODACC, as well," says Sue Hutchinson, director of product development for EPCglobal US, in Lawrenceville, N.J.

Alan Estevez, the DOD's assistant deputy under secretary of defense for supply chain integration, says that this revision is important because it will allow DOD suppliers to use a tag data construct that is recognized by all members of the EPCglobal Network. "I did not want to have a one-off data construct for the DOD—I wanted to have a standard data construct," he says.

This gives the DOD and its suppliers the ability to get quick data related to the CAGE and DODACC codes they use by looking them up in the EPCglobal Network's ONS (Object Naming Service).

"CAGE and DODACC numbers are now treated as a lookup in ONS just like any EPC manager number," says Hutchinson. The ONS provides an EPC supply chain partner's computer with the network location of information about an item associated with its tag's unique identification code (EPC or other numbering scheme included in the EPC tag standard). The ONS is similar to the Domain Name Service, which points computers to sites on the Internet.

Members of EPCglobal's Fast Moving Consumer Goods Business Action Group had been working with DOD representatives since August to hammer out both the revision to the EPCglobal tag data standard document and also the DOD's supplier policy guidelines for passive RFID, so that both documents would provide consistent information. (The DOD's passive RFID policy guidelines—as well as the active RFID guidelines—were finalized in August 2004. See DOD Releases Final RFID Policy.)

"The action group had to understand how the CAGE and DODACC would be used and how their uses would

be included in the passive RFID information guidelines, so that the two documents said the same thing," says Hutchinson.

The tag data standard revision to incorporate CAGE and DODAAC was ratified last month by EPCglobal's board of governors.

Hutchinson says that the ONS is structured to be able to work with a wide range of different codes and that EPCglobal is working with a number of vertical industry groups to incorporate their legacy codes into the tag data standard. It and the Automotive Industry Action Group, for example, are currently working on including the vehicle identification number (VIN) into the tag data standard.