

Canadian RFID Center Debuts

Backed by commercial and government funding, the facility will focus initially on the nation's retail, produce and consumer packaged goods industries.

By Jonathan Collins

Sept. 29, 2005—A federal agency, national grocery associations, RFID technology suppliers and [EPCglobal Canada](#) have joined to create the [Canadian RFID Center](#).

The new facility is located at the site of [IBM](#)'s Canadian headquarters in Markham, Ontario. It not only has conference rooms where Canadian companies can learn about EPC RFID technology and its potential benefits, but also a research lab for developing the RFID infrastructure needed to improve supply chain traceability.

"This center aims to help develop traceability guidelines for the agriculture sector," says N. Arthur Smith, president and CEO of EPCglobal Canada. "We'll be looking, in particular, at perishable goods and what needs to be built into the EPC Network design."

The facility will focus initially on the retail, produce and consumer packaged goods (CPG) industries, demonstrating how RFID can enable a more accurate and cost-effective way of implementing food traceability for frozen, fresh and dry goods. The 5,000-square-foot site includes EPC Class 1 Gen 2 RFID equipment, a freezer and cold storage areas. Thus, it can replicate conditions for tagged deliveries of perishable goods passing through dock doors into a simulated retailer's back room.

Research at the lab will look into how environmental conditions, particularly condensation, can affect the performance of passive UHF RFID tags in the perishable-food supply chain. Water absorbs RF signals and can impact the way interrogators read tags. "There are still issues to resolve when it comes to RFID and perishables. Anything that moves through changes in temperature picks up condensation, and we haven't really solved the condensation issues. We want to document what happens at below freezing. Some reports say keeping the temperature below freezing helps, others that it doesn't," says Smith. The center's research on this matter is expected to take at least six months.

The center has been established with a combined investment of CDN\$1.7 million (US\$1.4 million). Investors include Canada's [Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food](#), which invested CDN\$485,000 (US\$414,000); grocery industry groups [Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors](#), [Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers](#), [Produce Marketing Association](#) and [Food and Consumer Products of Canada](#); and RFID vendors and services suppliers [IBM Canada](#), [Intermec Technologies](#) and [Symbol Technologies](#).

Initially, Canadian food producers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers will all have access to the center through membership of the industry bodies backing the center. In the future, the center plans to expand its membership and extend its research to include other products and processes.

According to EPCglobal Canada, although no major Canadian retailer has announced plans to roll out RFID

in its operations, Canadian companies increasingly need to learn how RFID can be used. This is spurred not only by the growing use of RFID in the United States and the close trading ties between the two countries, Smith says, but also by mounting Canadian government interest in improving food traceability in the country's food supply chain.

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