Kimberly-Clark Deploys Gen 2 Readers

The consumer packaged goods manufacturer is using Alien's ALR-9800 interrogator in its RFID tagging system after picking it from a test group of other Gen 2-compliant machines.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

Jan. 26, 2006—Kimberly-Clark (K-C) says it is using the ALR-9800 RFID interrogator (reader) made by Morgan Hill, Calif.-based RFID hardware provider Alien Technology in its RFID-tagging operation. The consumer packaged goods manufacturer and early RFID adopter chose the reader from a pool of other Gen-2-compliant, multiprotocol models it tested last year in its 5,000-square-foot Auto-ID Sensing Technologies Performance Test Center in Neenah, Wisc.

"We tested the readers in multiple scenarios [with tags moving at] multiple speeds, and with many different [EPC passive] tags," says Gary Clement, technology development manager for Kimberly-Clark's Auto-ID Sensing Technologies group, which performs tests and makes RFID hardware recommendations for K-C's logistics division. The group is also responsible for deploying the company's RFID systems.

"The Alien ALR-9800 interrogator was the best-performing one," Clement says, adding that K-C's decision to use the ALR-9800 extends only as far as its current RFID-tagging operations, for compliance with retail mandates. "We're using the readers for our present use case, but as our scenarios change and as manufactures develop new readers, we'll continue to consider them."

Alien released the ALR-9800 interrogator in August (see Alien Debuts Gen 2 Interrogator). The device reads ultrahigh-frequency EPC Class 1 Gen 2 tags, as well as EPC Class 1 Gen 1 tags, which K-C is applying to cases and pallets today. According to Clement, the company is actively testing EPC Class 1 Gen 2 tags and hopes soon to begin applying them to the cases and pallets it ships to RFID-enabled retail distribution centers.

K-C uses the interrogators in its distribution centers and warehouses, where they are integrated into shrink-wrap machines used to ready pallets for shipment, and into conveyor systems or doorway portals. There, they read tags as they pass by, to verify the RFID inlays embedded in smart labels applied to cases and pallets of its goods can be successfully read. The firm also uses the interrogators to collect tag data and send it to back-end systems that compare the corresponding product data with the original order. This verifies that the tagged shipments are accurate.

"We're proud and pleased [about the selection of the ALR-9800]," says Keith McDonald, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Alien Technology, "not only because it is a validation of our product by an end user, but also by an EPCglobal-accredited EPC testing facility."

In September, EPCglobal announced it had accredited K-C's test lab as one of four centers world wide under the EPCglobal Performance Test Center Accreditation Program (see EPCglobal Certifies Gen 2 Hardware).

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