

EC Takes RFID Survey, Schedules Final Conference

The European Commission seeks a consensus regarding Europe's need for clear, predictable and stable policies about RFID, and the nature of those policies.

By Jonathan Collins

July 10, 2006—The [European Commission](#) (EC) has announced that on Oct. 16, it will hold its final event in its program to develop a [European Union](#)-wide RFID policy environment.

Set to be held in Brussels, the conference will be attended by Viviane Reding, commissioner for the EC's [Information Society and Media Directorate-General](#). Also attending will be other EC officials, members of the [European Parliament](#) and participants from industry, government and civil society. This will be last chance for concerned parties to help identify the main topics that will be addressed in the European Commission's planned December 2006 RFID communication to the [European Council](#) and the European Parliament.

The meeting caps a series of [RFID consultation initiatives](#) launched by the EC in March 2006, when it announced its plans to examine its role in regulating RFID across Europe (see [European Commission Works on RFID Policy](#)).

The EC believes its ongoing consultation process will enable it to produce a wide consensus regarding Europe's need for clear, predictable and stable policies about RFID, and the extent of those policies. According to the EC, much of its role lies in establishing a balance between the potential benefits of RFID for business and any concerns about the technology's potential to encroach on civil liberties. "The challenge consists in identifying and reaching the point of equilibrium; it is also to nurture a continuous and constructive dialogue with Europe's international partners in order to narrow the policy gap [caused by the current lack of regulation and guidance]," says Gérald Santucci, head of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Enterprise Networking unit of the Information Society and Media Directorate-General.

The EC initiative has won support from RFID vendors, analysts, end users and privacy groups, as well as some national government agencies from outside Europe. "The consultation process has been most welcome indeed," says Toby Stevens, director at the [Enterprise Privacy Group](#), a privacy consultancy based in Odiham, United Kingdom. "The EC's intervention should serve to refocus the debate [about RFID] and find a pragmatic balance between RFID technologies and privacy rights."

Last week, the EC followed up the workshop series with the launch of a new [RFID survey](#), enabling members of the public to voice their opinions on the potential development of the technology.

From May to June, the EC held five educational workshops tackling the potential impact of RFID on business and society. These workshops addressed such topics as emerging trends, personal privacy and security, RFID standards and interoperability, radio spectrum allocation and the future of RFID technology. Accessible via a live stream over the Web, the workshops gathered a total of approximately 120 speakers and 450 attendees.

The [RFID Consultation](#) Web site offers reports on all the workshops held this year, with background information on RFID and a link to the online survey. The survey invites interested parties to enter comments and opinions about the adoption of RFID in Europe, as well as the role the EU should take in aiding and controlling that uptake.

The survey comprises 39 questions, grouped into six categories: respondent details; general questions; RFID use, security, privacy and safety; standardization and interoperability; frequency spectrum; and research. The EC prepared the questionnaire based on the outcome of the five RFID consultation workshops. "The debates during the workshops were opportunities to recall and focus the positions of the various stakeholders on the policy options," says Santucci.

"We gave priority to closed-ended questions, as they allow for rapid answers, are easy to code, and level differences between articulate and inarticulate respondents. However, because of their limited range of options, we also complemented these questions with a few open-ended questions, allowing for greater freedom of expression," he says.

The online survey, part of the EC's "[Your Voice in Europe](#)" Web site, was launched on July 3. The EC says it has already drawn responses from European and non-European countries alike, including Japan, the United States and Korea. The survey will remain online until mid-September.

Registration to attend the conference will be available shortly at the [RFID Consultation Web site](#).

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