

# DOD Getting Gen 2 Ready

The Department of Defense is expanding its RFID requirements and infrastructure while it takes steps toward transitioning its requirements to support the EPC UHF Gen 2 standard.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

July 28, 2006—Back in May, the U.S. Department of Defense issued an interim rule, or proposed amendment, to its Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS). The interim rule expanded the categories of supplies that require RFID tags, and also increased the number of the department's Defense Distribution Centers (DDCs) to which the tagged shipments should be shipped. The interim rule also included an Oct. 1, 2006, sunset on the use of Gen 1 Class 1 EPC UHF tags, as well as of the [Symbol Technologies](#) Class 0 tags. After that date, the DDCs will accept only tags compliant with the EPC UHF Class 1 Gen 2 standard.

"While the Department [of Defense] is fielding equipment capable of reading both Gen 1 and Gen 2 tags, we want to achieve—and we want our suppliers to achieve—the best performance possible when using RFID," says Alan Estevez, the DOD's assistant deputy undersecretary. "Generation 2 provides that enhanced performance."

The original DFARS, finalized in September (see [DOD Finalizes RFID Mandate Language](#)), required RFID tags be used on cases and pallets of packaged operational rations, clothing, tools, personal demand items, and weapon system repair parts sent to two RFID-enabled DDCs. The interim rule, which went into effect the day it was released, on May 19, requires that shipments of packaged petroleum, lubricants, oils, preservatives, chemicals, additives, construction and barrier materials, and medical materials would also require tags if being sent to the two original RFID-enabled DDCs and the additional DDCs, which are located in Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Washington.

The DOD says that the new list brings most types of commodities it receives under the tagging mandate. After the interim rule was released, it was followed by a two-month period for public comment. Estevez's office says it is currently reviewing the comments received during the comment period and will make changes to the interim rule, if necessary, before publication of the final rule, for which it has not provided an expected date. DOD suppliers are not required to comply with the mandate until its contract officer includes the new rule into its supply contract. But Estevez's office says it does not keep a list of how many DOD supplier contracts include the mandate.

Also in May, the DOD took steps to prepare the newly designated DDCs to receive and process RFID-tagged shipments. It awarded a contract to RFID systems integrator [ODIN Technologies](#) to select, test and install the physical infrastructure the centers require, such as interrogators and antennas (see [DOD Grants ODIN \\$14.6 Million Contract](#)). Last week, [Psion Teklogix](#) announced that the DOD had awarded it a contract to provide the RFID software needed to use the hardware and link it to the DDC IT infrastructure (see [DOD Grants Psion Teklogix \\$1.8 Million Contract](#)).

Now, the Defense Logistics Agency, a DOD agency that operates the DDCs, says that ODIN has begun installing and testing new RFID interrogation portals at the largest DDC, the Susquehanna Defense Distribution Center in Pennsylvania, where four RFID interrogation ports already exist, because the Susquehanna depot is one of two sites that have already been receiving RFID-tagged shipments. All told, more than 300 RFID portals will be installed across the 19 DDCs in the United States by the end of the year. According to ODIN's contract, the seven DDCs located outside the United States will be ready to receive tagged shipments by the end of 2007. ODIN is installing 55 additional portals—32 at the depot's main site in New Cumberland, Pa., and 23 at a detachment facility in Mechanicsburg, Pa.

To test the RFID readers, ODIN staff are passing a test pallet, carrying 20 tagged cases, through each newly installed portal 10 times while a technician nearby monitors a laptop computer that indicates whether tags are being read. Before ODIN certifies the equipment readiness, antenna placement and network connectivity, each of the 20 tags on the test pallet must be read successfully 10 times in a row. This test simulates the receipt of a shipment from a supplier.

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