

DHS Proposes Vicinity RFID Technology for PASSport Card

The cards would contain passive EPC Gen 2 RFID tags, with a read range up to 20 feet to facilitate the processing of multiple travelers simultaneously.

By Claire Swedberg

Oct. 20, 2006—The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of State spelled out plans on Tuesday for the use of the RFID-enabled PASSport card at U.S. ports of entry. Under the newly proposed rule, Americans driving across U.S. borders or traveling by sea from Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean or Bermuda will carry a driver's license-sized card with an RFID chip that could be used instead of a traditional passport book at those crossings and be read through a vehicle as the owner approaches the border.

This PASSport would add another layer to the U.S. government's plans to enhance U.S. security as part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). The WHTI requires that all Americans provide proof of citizenship and identity when crossing its borders by June 2009.

Use of RFID for the PASSport card, part of the People Access Security Service (PASS) system, is intended not only to improve security but also to facilitate the flow of legitimate travel and trade. The DHS has already installed RFID readers for the PAST, NEXUS and SENTRI programs. These three voluntary, limited programs use RFID and have more than 250,000 participants, according to the DHS.

As proposed, the PASSport cards would use passive EPC Gen 2 RFID tags conforming to the ISO 18000 6-C specification, with a read range up to 20 feet from the reader. The RFID chip would contain the unique ID number of the PASSport card, while data specific to the person owning that card would be linked to that number in a database managed by CBP. Readers could process information from as many as eight PASSports at a time. The State Department also reviewed, but rejected, proximity RFID chips, which require a card be presented within 4 inches of a reader and conform to the ISO 14443 standard. Unlike a proximity-card system, a vicinity-card PASSport system would be able to read multiple cards at once, such as when many people are in a single car, and allow border agents to access information about the travelers before they even reach the crossing, further expediting the process.

According to the DHS, each PASSport card would be issued with a protective sleeve designed to make it unreadable and, thereby, protect it from unauthorized access. Travelers approaching a border would need to remove the card from the sleeve. The card would cost \$20 for adults and \$10 for minors, and could not be used as a replacement to the passport book allowing Americans to travel in foreign countries beyond North America.

The proposed PASSport card regulations are available for public viewing at the Regulations.gov Web site for a 60-day period. The Department of Homeland Security is accepting comments from the public on this new regulation, identified as document DOS-2006-0329-0001 on the Regulations.gov Web site, until Dec. 18.

