

The company will apply with bar-code, text and RFID labels to stacking crates used to transport car parts.

By Beth Bacheldor

Dec. 1, 2006—The Asia-Pacific division of [CHEP](#), a pallet and reusable-container rental company headquartered in Orlando, Fla., has added injection-molded crates for the Australian automotive industry to its growing arsenal of tagged containers.

The crates feature three separate identification tags: [EPCglobal](#) Gen 2 UHF dual-dipole 915 MHz tags, bar-coded labels and human-readable text labels. The crates are produced using a process in which molten plastic is injected into a metal mold at high pressure to create light, durable stacking crates that meet a customer's specific requirements. Automotive companies typically use the crates to transport parts along the supply chain.

The company will affix bar-coded labels and text tags to the outside of the crate for manual reads, says James Meares, vice president of automotive services at CHEP's Asia-Pacific division. CHEP is including the labels for those customers who have not yet added RFID to their infrastructure. This allows them to track the crates in their operations, with CHEP maintaining inventory information about which customers have which reusable crates.

The RFID tags, also affixed to the outside of the crate, will add automated tracking capabilities. Automotive companies are interested in this feature because RFID can, as Meares explains, "improve [the] visibility of products, assets and materials within the supply chain." Crates will be tagged at CHEP Australia Service Centers, while the RFID tags will be encoded with unique Electronic Product Codes (EPCs) and asset numbers CHEP uses to inventory its reusable crates. At the service centers, located throughout Australia, employees will track the crates for internal inventory processes, using fixed and mobile RFID readers. Customers can use the CHEP asset number to track the flow of the products shipped in the crates, Meares says, both within their manufacturing environment and across their extended supply chain.

Meares declines to name any automotive customers currently using the RFID-tagged modular crates, but says there has been strong interest since the recent launch of the new product.

Prior to unveiling the tagged crates for the Australian automotive industry, CHEP announced an RFID-enabled program designed to provide global customers with increased supply-chain visibility. This program, the CHEP Global Track and Trace System, uses software that collects RFID tag data from the firm's PLUS ID pallets and other reusable containers. These include Intermediate Bulk Containers (IBCs)—large reusable vats used to ship liquid raw materials, food ingredients and bulk quantities of manufactured products. The system affixes Gen 2 tags to the center post inside the pallets, as well as on the sides of IBCs (see [CHEP Announces New RFID-Enabled Container-Tracking, Service](#)).