

Australian Defense Force Begins RFID-Tagging Shipments

The military has deployed the same active RFID technology used by the United States and other allies, to enable interoperability and improved visibility of supplies to troops.

By Claire Swedberg

April 13, 2007—The [Australian Defense Force](#) (ADF) has begun utilizing active RFID tags to track the supplies it sends to the Middle East and throughout its own country. On April 11, at [Sydney's Mascot Airport](#), the department shipped its first RFID-tagged cargo on airplanes destined for Iraq and Afghanistan.

The ADF has joined [NATO](#), the [U.S. Department of Defense](#) (DOD), United Kingdom and other countries in adopting the Track and Trace RFID system from [Savi Technology](#). This system involves affixing active RFID tags to shipments that can be tracked with fixed and handheld RFID readers throughout the theater of war in the Middle East, and also domestically. Because the ADF's RFID network is interoperable with those of its allies, the military organization can share shipment data with other countries and NATO, such as where they are and when they arrive.

With the Track and Trace system, Australia can link to the Savi network so other nations' military personnel can capture RFID tags' transmissions with their own RFID readers, then have the tag's data routed directly to Australia.

The ADF is attaching the Savi RFID tags to pallets and boxes containing such things as weapons, food, medical supplies and spare parts, as well as to certain high-value items, as they are loaded onto planes. The defense force captures a read of the tags before they leave, and again when the shipments arrive at other airports, get loaded in warehouses and arrive at military bases. The ADF is also attaching the tags to shipping containers traveling by ocean. The active 433 MHz tags comply with ISO 18000-7, a standard approved for use in most countries. The data on the read-write tags includes a unique RFID number and could also contain other details about the items being shipped.

The Track and Trace system incorporates Savi's Web-based SmartChain Consignment Management Application (CMA), a software system that links RFID data from an interrogator to the government agency that owns the tag. Data captured by an RFID reader is managed by the SmartChain Site Manager software, which collects data read by RFID devices, incorporates local business rules at supply chain nodes and routes the data to the appropriate agency. NATO started deploying the CMA system in late 2005 (see [NATO Rolling Out System for Sharing Data](#)).

The ADF is a significant participant in the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although it is not a NATO member, says Bruce Jacquemard, Savi's executive vice president of global sales and alliances, the country has an interest in being part of the interoperability network shared by other NATO member-countries. "Australia looked at it such that if they wanted to have interoperability and compatibility with the rest of the world, they should implement the same technology," he says.

RELATED_ARTICLES The ADF spent about one year working on the system before rolling it out this month, Jacquemard says (see [Australia's Military to Track Supplies](#)). Early planning included setting up a data infrastructure, as well as a network of more than 30 RFID read locations in Australian airports, seaports, freight depots and military bases. The tags are also available with sensors designed to detect temperature or shipment tampering.

According to Jacquemard, the initial shipment of April 11 was the beginning of a full-scale rollout. Presently, he says, the ADF is in the process of tagging shipments destined for the Middle East, East Timor and other locations.

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