

GlaxoSmithKline Remains Committed to RFID

Contradicting a recent news report, the drug maker says it will continue conducting pilots to demonstrate how RFID can be used to secure the pharma supply chain.

By Beth Bacheldor

Aug. 28, 2007—Despite a recent media report that [GlaxoSmithKline](#) (GSK) was thinking of forsaking radio frequency identification technology, the drug manufacturer says it remains committed to exploring how RFID can be used to improve the visibility of pharmaceutical products in the supply chain, and to curb drug counterfeiting and theft.

"RFID remains in place," says GSK spokesperson Mary Ann Rhyne. "In fact, we've extended the RFID testing, and no cut-off time has been determined." The news article had suggested that by year's end, GSK might abandon its efforts to test RFID tags on individual bottles of products considered at risk for counterfeiting, because the project has been fraught with technical difficulties. That article ran in *The Times*, a newspaper published in the United Kingdom, and also appeared on the [TimesOnline Web site](#).

In March 2006, GSK began a six-month RFID pilot to determine how effective RFID technology might be at authenticating drugs. The pilot involved placing high-frequency (HF) passive tags, encoded with an Electronic Product Code (EPC) containing the factory ID number and a random serialized number, on all bottles of Trizivir manufactured for U.S. distribution at the company's plant in Zebulon, N.C. Trizivir is an HIV medicine that the [National Association of Boards of Pharmacy](#) has identified as most susceptible to counterfeiting and diversion.

GSK's pilot leveraged 13.56 MHz tags complying with the ISO 15693 standard. The pilot also employed IBM RFID middleware that collected and filtered the tag data, associating it with batch and order information as the units of tagged Trizivir moved from the packaging line to a GSK distribution center in Raleigh, N.C. (see [GlaxoSmithKline Tests RFID on HIV Drug](#)).

When the project first started, GSK executives announced that they would test RFID for six months, then evaluate whether to continue with more pilot projects. Rhyne says the company has since expanded its RFID initiatives, though she declines to elaborate further. "We are looking at all different technologies, and it is a constant process," she says. "But we are committed to continuing to put significant resources toward these efforts, including RFID projects."

Other pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors—including [Pfizer](#), [Purdue Pharma](#), [McKesson](#) and [Cardinal Health](#)—have also been testing RFID's ability to help secure the supply chain and fight counterfeiting.

Pfizer, for example, carried out a pilot that involved the affixing of HF tags to more than 2 million bottles of Viagra, and the application of passive UHF EPC tags to 55,000 cases and 400 pallets containing the drug. In late 2006, after the trial's conclusion, the company announced plans to begin applying EPC Gen 2 UHF RFID tags to all cases and pallets of Celebrex—a pain reliever and anti-inflammatory—bound for the U.S. market

(see [Pfizer to Tag Celebrex](#)).

RELATED_ARTICLES For the past several years, the [U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) has been recommending the use of RFID for product authentication (see [FDA Issues New 'Counterfeit Drug Task Force' Report](#)).

According to Rhyne, GSK intends to continue investigating RFID's potential. "We are always looking at how to better protect patient safety, secure the supply chain and discourage the counterfeiting," she says.

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